

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす( TENKY )

GENESISシリーズ

# 境界線上の ホライゾン VI

下



GENESISシリーズ  
境界線上のホライゾンⅥ(下)

——これはちょっと想定外です。  
ついに始まった小田原征伐。戦前会議を経て、北条、羽柴、毛利、最上、上杉、澁川、伊達、武蔵——全勢力入り乱れた“総合相対戦”形式を取るようになった。歴史再現の行く末を世界各国が見守る中、武蔵が毛利代表である人狼女士への刺客として送り出した人物は、誰もが想定すらしていなかったあの人物だった？  
どうもこいつも主張重視のバトルロイヤルが温泉街でついに始まる一方、六蔵式仏蘭西では真性全裸が光り出す。各国が本能寺の変とその先の未来を見据え動き始めた初の大規模歴史再現。その戦いに勝利するのは？　そしてノリキと氏直の因縁は——？ 第六話、終盤戦！



川上 稔

か-5-46



GENESISシリーズ  
境界線上のホライゾンⅥ(下)

川上 稔



電撃文庫



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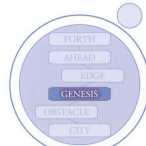
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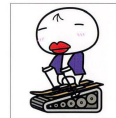
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The 1st.GENESIS



かわかみ 稔  
川上 稔

1975年1月3日生まれ。東京出身。千年に一度という  
新しい星を切り取るため、冷凍期には山ほどのチョコミ  
ントアイスがあるらしい。食べ過ぎてお腹を冷やさな  
いようにして下さいね。

【電撃文庫作品】

都市シリーズ

パンツァーホリス1935

エアリアルシティ

風水街都 香港(上)(下)

森楽都市OSAKA(上)(下)

閉鎖都市 巴里(上)(下)

機中都市 柏林1～5

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ATHEADシリーズ

終わりのクロニクル①～⑦

GENESISシリーズ

境界線上のホライゾンⅠ(上)～Ⅵ(下)

FORTHEシリーズ

連射王(上)(下)

イラスト:さとやす(TENKY)

山形生まれの超大作ち「読むたて」で「C」帯扱いすぎて毎朝眠い  
深い睡眠です！先生、書いてから10分ほど寝なくてはダメ  
でしょう。



## ■福島・正則■

戦国時代の終わり頃から江戸時代の初期に活躍した武将で、  
世代的には結構遅めの人となります。

結構な強さを持った人なのですが、とにかくうっかり癖と、  
妙なところで発揮される小心スキルがあって、  
それがために武具を奪われたり最終的には改易されたりと、  
何とも噛み合わない生き方を送っていたりです。

ただ、没落の流れの中では、幕府が罫に嵌めたようなフシもあって、  
一概な評価はし難いと思っています。

ある意味、幕府にとっては警戒しておかねばならない  
人間だったということでもありますから。

ただ、よく見ていると、どうも思考が  
「勝てるんだったらどんな手でも、どんな小さい勝ちでも拾おう」  
「負けるんだったらソッコ退こう」

みたいな割り切りが凄い強く感じるんですがこの人……。

ある意味、すごくドライ。

このあたり、相方となる清正とよくやりとりをしていたりするのですが、  
真面目かつ参謀的思考の出来る清正と、ちょっと野生思考の福島が、  
ミョーに噛み合っていて面白かったりです。

福島、貴方、清正に口で勝ったこと無いだろう多分……。

こっちの方では、戦闘への意義など、勝利優先で捉えている、  
ドライな強キャラ、という感で。

段々とそこにいろいろな思いや熱が入るようになっていきますが、  
まだまだ成長盛りというところですね。

デザインとしては、歴史上の福島・正則が使用していた兜、  
一ノ谷の大立て物を、紙飾りと武器に転用しています。

加速術の“逆落とし”は一ノ谷＝源・義経が  
一ノ谷の合戦で崖を馬で駆け下りた  
“逆落とし”戦術からついている感じで。

作中では、描きにくいのであまりいないアンシンメトリな髪型だったり、  
何処となく大人っぽくしてます。

狙いとしてはアスリートタイプ。

同年代や後輩達に陰から憧れを向けられてるタイプとか、  
そんな風で考えていたりします。

(川上稔)



# Cover Flap

Kawakami Minoru: Born on January 3, 1975. From Tokyo. To overcome the hottest summer in a millennium, he apparently has tons of mint chocolate chip ice cream in his freezer. Try not to eat too much and give your stomach a chill.

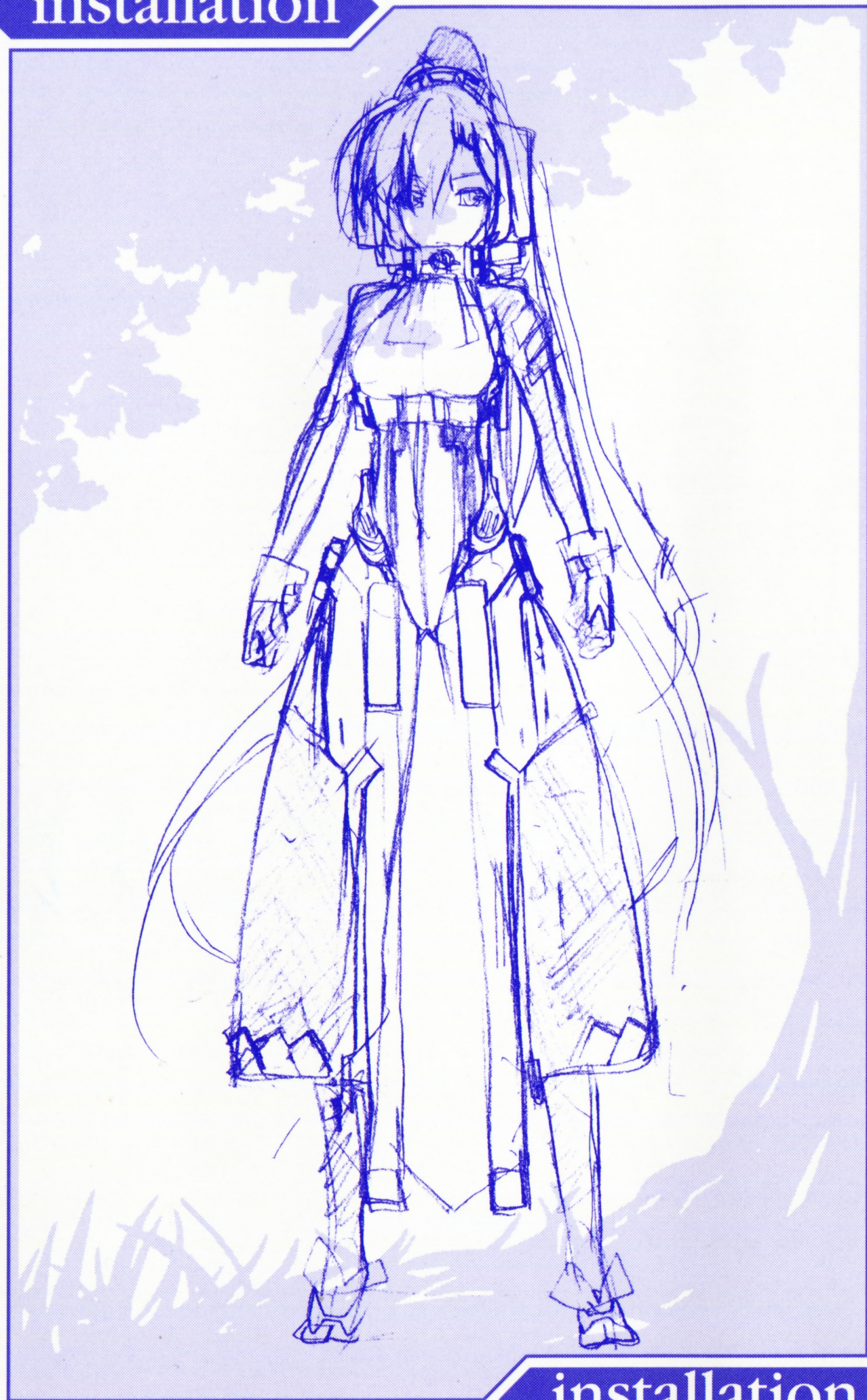
Satoyasu: Born in Yamagata and raised in Tochigi. “Fresh-baked bread is so good I buy and eat some every morning on the way to work.” Sensei, it’s hot, so get something to drink with your bread.



# Installation



installation



installation

## Fukushima Masanori

He was a commander active from the end of the Warring States period to the beginning of the Edo period, so he was a bit of a latecomer.

He had a fair bit of strength, but he could be careless and had a skill at timidity that showed itself in the weirdest places, so he would lose his equipment and was eventually demoted, making for something of a mismatched life.

But in the lead up to his fall, there were signs that the shogunate set him up, so I think he is a hard person to judge unconditionally.

In a way, he was someone the shogunate had to worry about.

But when you look closely, he seemed good at being very decisive so he would go for even the smallest victory if he could win, but he would immediately withdraw if he would lose...

In a way, he was incredibly dry.

He did a lot of arguing with his partner Kiyomasa over these things, but since Kiyomasa was diligent and could think like a staff officer while Fukushima's thinking was wilder, they fit together in a weirdly amusing way.

Fukushima, I'm guessing you never did beat Kiyomasa in an argument...

For my version, I made her a dry and strong character who prioritizes victory when finding meaning in battle.

She is gradually gaining a variety of thoughts and passions, but she still has a lot of room for growth.

For the design, I took Ichinotani, the helmet worn by the historical Fukushima Masanori, and made it into a hair decoration and a weapon.

Her acceleration spell Headfirst Fall came from the association of Ichinotani with Minamoto no Yoshitsune and his "Headfirst Fall" strategy of riding their horses down the cliff during the Battle of Ichinotani.

She has an asymmetrical hairstyle you don't see often because it's hard to



draw and that makes her look somehow mature.

I was trying to give her an athletic look.

I think of her as the type who is secretly looked up to by those in her year and her underclassmen.

(Kawakami Minoru)

**Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon - Horizon on the  
Middle of Nowhere - 6C**





——頑張れ。

VI

下

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

—Do your best.



# Characters

horizon  
on the Middle  
of Nowhere  
episode.06





horizon  
on the Middle  
of Nowhere  
episode.06





# Game Ad



特報

# 武蔵 vs 北条 Musashi vs Houjyou

対戦型格闘アクション

PLAYER SELECT

YOSHIAKI

MITO  
KA-CHAN

画像はすべて開発中のものです



「フフ、それじゃあテストプレイで対戦スタート！ ミトツダイラ？  
不慣れなアンタは最強キャラのミトカーチャンで来なさい！」

「え！？ 何コレですか、というか、うちの母親は何でこんな処で  
最強キャラしてますの！？ 最強って言ったら大体が砲台プレイの  
キャラですけど、智は何処ですか？ まさか時限隠し！？」

「何か飛び火が来ましたが、今回私は出てませんから！  
あと、喜美もダイヤグラム上位の義光さんですよ！？」



Top left target: Special Report

Top right: Competitive Fighting Action

Below player select screen: Screenshot from a beta version.

Kimi: Heh heh. Okay, let's start a match to test it out! Mitotsudaira? Since you're a beginner, you use the strongest character: Mito Mom!

Nate: Eh? What is this? And why is my mother the strongest character!? I thought the gunner characters were the strongest, so where's Tomo? Don't tell me she won't be unlocked until later!

Asama: I see you're trying to drag me into this, but I'm not a part of it! And, Kimi, you chose Yoshiaki-san who is also top tier, didn't you!?

# Far Eastern History

## First of all

During a summer of chaotic battle

The heat is their reward

Hopefully their way of life will be of some use



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Illustrations: Satoyasu (TENKY) Cover Design: Watanabe Kouichi (2725 Inc)  
Book Design Concept: TENKY

# Characters



● 武蔵



**葵・喜美**

トリーの姉でエロとダンスの神を信仰する。基本的に  
高压で応用的に身勝手。



**浅間・智**

武蔵の主社である浅間神社の娘。トリーや喜美の幼  
馴染み兼人生の被害者。



**アデーレ・バルフェット**

仏蘭西から流れてきた従士家系。眼鏡娘。



**御広敷・銀二**

ハート様系体格の食通でオタク。



**シロジロ・ベルトーニ**

会計。武蔵の商工会の若手幹部。



**トゥーサン・ネシンバラ**

書記。歴史好きの作家志望者で同人作家。



**ネイト・ミツダイラ**

第五特務。水戸松平の襲名者で騎士家系。人狼ハ  
ーフ。



**ノリキ**

家族を支える勤労少年。不器用型格闘家。無口で  
無愛想。



**ハッサン・フルブシ**

カルピスマーク系インド人。カレーだけ食って飲んで生  
きてる。



**ホライゾン・アリアダスト**

トリーの幼馴染みで現三河君主。現在自動人形中。  
感情が大罪武装の部品として奪われている。



**本多・正純**

副会長。昨年度の三河からの真面目転入生。いろい  
ろ家庭の事情あり。



**マルゴット・ナイト**

第三特務。金髪六枚翼の黒魔術師。笑い顔の方。



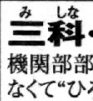
**向井・鈴**

目が見えないけど頑張る少女。皆のストッパー。



**立花・間**

元三征西班牙第三特務。宗茂の嫁で砲撃系義腕  
少女。五十回。



**三科・大**

機関部部長の孫娘。メカ好き。直政の後輩にあたる。“だい”じゃ  
なくて“ひろ”。



**里見・義康**

里見教導院生徒会長の少女。小さくても泣かない。  
武神“義”を操る。



**葵・トリー**

主人公。武蔵アリアダスト学院の総長兼生徒会長。  
“不可能男”。



**東**

帝の子供で半神。能力など全て封じられて武蔵で生  
活する。



**伊藤・健児**

快活なインキュバス。全裸で禿のマッスル系。通称イト  
ケン。



**キヨナリ・ウルキアガ**

第二特務。航空系半竜で異端審問官志望。通称ウ  
ッキー。



**点蔵・クロスユナイト**

第一特務。いつも帽子などで顔を隠す忍者で使いっ  
走り。



**直政**

第六特務。機関部で働く姉御。煙草はふかすわデカ  
い声で笑うわで。



**ネンジ**

HP3くらいのスライム。男らしい。



**ハイディ・オーゲザヴァラー**

会計補佐。シロジロのパートナーで白狐エリマキつき。



**ペルソナ君**

バケツヘルムの超マッチョ。無口で怪力で心優しい。



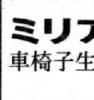
**本多・二代**

元三河の学生。本多・忠勝の息女。自称拙者、御座  
る語尾の濃い目。



**マルガ・ナルゼ**

第四特務。黒髪六枚翼の白魔術師。漫研所属。



**ミリアム・ポークウ**

車椅子生活のため、在宅就学している少女。



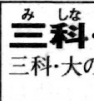
**立花・宗茂**

元三征西班牙第一特務。アモーレ。現在は襲名解  
除で再起願中。



**メアリ・スチュアート**

英国女王エリザベスの異母姉。金髪巨乳。点蔵の未  
来嫁として同居中。王賜剣一型のオーナー。



**三科・翔一**

三科・大の父。泰造の義理の息子。関東IZUMOの長。



**大久保・忠隣／長安**

極東には珍しい二重襲名の代表委員長。二年。イン  
チキ関西弁。

character

# character

## ●教導院関係者



かのう  
**加納**

大久保の侍女。自動人形。風紀委員長。二年。



だて しげ ざね (なるみ)  
**伊達・成実**

政宗の従弟役。伊達家の副長で、機動殻”不転百足”を使用。余裕あり気味おねーさん風。



**オリオトライ・真喜子**

高速戦闘型女教師。いつもジャージ。



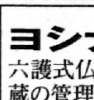
さかい ただ づぐ  
**酒井・忠次**

武蔵アリアダスト学院学長。昔はかなり出来る人でしたが左遷。



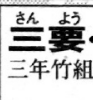
“**武蔵**”

武蔵を統括する自動人形で総艦長。辛辣口調がたまいません。



**ヨシナオ**

六護式仏蘭西から派遣された武蔵王。教導院への否決権と武蔵の管理権を持つ。



さん よう みつ き  
**三要・光紀**

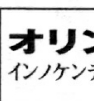
三年竹組の担任。オリオトライを先輩と仰ぐ。何か微妙に不幸。

## ●M.H.R.R.



はしば とう きち ろう  
**羽柴・藤吉郎**

M.H.R.R.副会長、自動人形の猿面少女。おどおどボンバー系。



**オリンピア**

インノケンティウスの義姉にして義妹。現教皇総長。



**マティアス**

M.H.R.R.旧派の代表。総長兼生徒会長。傀儡楽しいです!



まえ だ とし いえ  
**前田・利家**

旧派の代表。会計。霊体になっており、妻の“まつ”と日々平穏に中間職。



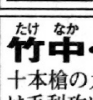
ふく しま まさ のり  
**福島・正則**

羽柴麾下。十本槍のナンバー1。御座ります語尾を使用する。



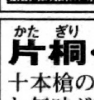
か とう きよ まさ  
**加藤・清正**

羽柴麾下。十本槍のナンバー2。金髪巨乳系で丁寧口調。



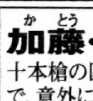
たけ なか はん べ え  
**竹中・半兵衛**

十本槍の九番。羽柴の軍師。長寿族のお気楽姉さん。聖譜記述では毛利攻めの前に死亡するので、黒田・官兵衛も二重襲名。



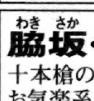
かた ざり かつ もと  
**片桐・且元**

十本槍の十番。真面目少年で交渉役などもこなす。かなり遊ばれ気味だけど気にせず男らしく頑張ります!



か とう よし あき  
**加藤・嘉明**

十本槍の四番。金髪金翼の白魔術師。鋭い口調でものを言う一方で、意外に全体のまとめ役。



わき さか やす はる (アンジー)  
**脇坂・安治**

十本槍の五番。黒髪黒翼の黒魔術師。お気楽系だが、本当にお気楽系。場の流れをパワーアップ。



はち す か こう ろく  
**蜂須賀・小六**

ジョーロク。武神乗りで日溜玄武の搭乗者。十本槍でクール子供。



か に さい ぞう  
**可児・才蔵**

名字読めない率超高め。元気者の十本槍補佐。福島の後輩にあたる。通称カニ玉。

## ●P.A.Oda



さつ さ なり まさ  
**佐々・成政**

P.A.Oda六天魔軍、五大頂の一人。ヤンキー系で突撃派。でも几帳面。



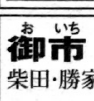
しば た かつ いえ  
**柴田・勝家**

P.A.Oda六天魔軍、五大頂の一人。体育会系。最近結婚して困りもの。



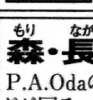
ふ わ みつ はる  
**不破・光治**

P.A.Odaの対上越露西亞現地会計。利家、成政と三人で“三人衆”と呼ばれる。



お いち  
**御市**

柴田・勝家の妻。おっとり系パーサーカー。



もり なが よし  
**森・長可**

P.A.Odaの中で最も雄度が高い好青年。インパクトの瞬間にヘッドが回る。



たき がわ いち ます  
**滝川・一益**

築城や艦船操作に秀でたP.A.Odaの忍者武将。



# character

## ●伊達



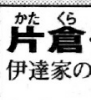
### だて まさむね 伊達・政宗

伊達家の当主。竜神の力を受け継いでいる。伊達家の総長兼生徒会長でもある。



### よし ひめ 義姫

政宗の母。鬼型長寿族と人間のハーフ。仙台伊達教導院の学長。



### かた くら こしゅうろう 片倉・小十郎

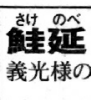
伊達家の副会長。テンション上下が激しいが選択式。

## ●最上



### も がみ よし あき 最上・義光

「羽州の狐」と呼ばれる裏切り上等大名。極寒の最上を一代でまとめあげた辣腕。



### さけ のべ (しゃけのべ) 鯉延

義光様のフォローをする走狗ですモン!

## ●六護式仏蘭西



### ルイ・エクシヴ

六護式仏蘭西総長。太陽王の爽やか好青年。神の血を引く。



### もう り てる もと 毛利・輝元

六護式仏蘭西生徒会長。エクシヴの妻。ヤンキー系。将来、西軍の長として武蔵側の敵に回る運命。



### 三銃士のアンリ

戦闘系の女性型自動人形。リーダー格で、輝元の護衛役。制御式大刀の使い手。



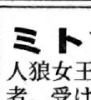
### 三銃士のアルマン

戦闘系の男性型自動人形。広範囲重力制御の使い手。



### じん ろう じょ oushou 人狼女王

チュレンヌ。六護式仏蘭西の副長。ミトツダイラの母ちゃん。かなり大雑把な巨乳。



### ミトツダイラの父

人狼女王の旦那。幸せいっぱいであつた泣いてしまう被害者。受け身と言うより攻め込まれ派。二十四日。

### ベルンハルト

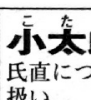
M.H.R.R.出身の傭兵隊長だけど改派として本国を裏切って転戦した人を襲名したオッサンだけど中身は天竜で六護式仏蘭西側という複雑さ。

## ●北条



### ほうじょう うし なお 北条・氏直

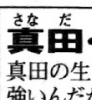
北条印度諸国連合の総長兼生徒会長。鬼型長寿族だが、自動人形の身体となっている。



### こ たらう 小太郎

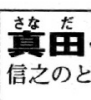
氏直についている少女忍者型の走狗。優秀なのだが子供扱い。

## ●真田



### さな だ のぶ ゆき 真田・信之

真田の生徒会長兼総長。偉いんだか偉くないんだか解らないし強いんだか強くないんだか解らないけど長生きするタイプ。



### さな だ まさ ゆき 真田・昌幸

信之のトーちゃん。真田教導院の学長。



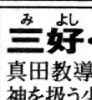
### うん の ろく ろう 海野・六郎

真田教導院の十勇士の七番。踊り子の傾奇者。舞踏型の剣術をこなす。



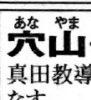
### か けい じゅう ぞう 寛・十蔵

真田教導院の十勇士の十番。制御式の射撃術を用いる長身瘦躯。



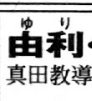
### み よし い さ 三好・伊佐

真田教導院の十勇士の四番。別名は伊佐入道。制御式の武神を扱う少女。



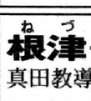
### あな やま こ すけ 穴山・小助

真田教導院の十勇士の五番。人の良さそうな顔の男。忍術をこなす。



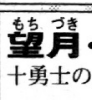
### ゆ り かま の すけ 由利・鎌之介

真田教導院の十勇士の六番。剣術を得意とする。



### ね づ じん ぱち 根津・陣八

真田教導院の十勇士の八番。狙撃を得意とする。



### もち づき ゆき ただ 望月・幸忠

十勇士の九番。自動人形で爆砕術式を扱う。

# character

## ● Musashi

- Aoi Kimi: Toori's older sister and worshipper of the god of eroticism and dancing. Fundamentally high-tension and selfish in practice.
- Aoi Toori: Protagonist. Musashi Ariadust Academy's chancellor and student council president. Mr. Impossible.
- Asama Tomo: Daughter of the Asama Shrine, Musashi's main shrine. Childhood friend and overall victim of Toori and Kimi.
- Azuma: Child of the emperor and a half-god. All his abilities have been sealed and he lives on the Musashi.
- Adele Balfette: From a vassal family that arrived from France. Glasses girl.
- Itou Kenji: Cheerful incubus. Nude, bald, and muscular. Known as Itoken.
- Ohiroshiki Ginji: Gourmet otaku with a Heart-sama style build.
- Kiyonari Urquiaga: 2nd special duty officer. Flying half-dragon. Hopes to be an inquisitor. Known as Uqui.
- Shirojiro Bertoni: Treasurer. Young leading member of Musashi's commerce and industry guild.
- Tenzou Crossunite: 1st special duty officer. Ninja and errand-runner who always covers his face with his hat.
- Toussaint Neshinbara: Secretary. Loves history, wants to be an author, and writes doujins.
- Naomasa: 6th special duty officer. Older sister type who works in the engine division. Smokes and laughs loudly.
- Nate Mitotsudaira: 5th special duty officer. Member of a knight family and inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name. Half werewolf.
- Nenji: Slime with about 3 HP. Manly.
- Noriki: Laborer boy who supports his family. Clumsy martial artist. Silent and unsociable.
- Heidi Augesvarer: Treasurer's aide. Shirojiro's partner. Has a white fox named Erimaki.
- Hassan Furubushi: Calpis logo-style Indian. Lives while eating and drinking only curry.
- Persona-kun: Super macho man with a bucket helmet. Silent, strong, and kindhearted.
- Horizon Ariadust: Toori's childhood friend and current ruler of Mikawa.

Currently an automaton. Her emotions were taken as parts for the Logismoi Oplo.

- Honda Futayo: Former Mikawa student. Honda Tadakatsu's daughter. Uses a strongly old-fashioned speech pattern.
- Honda Masazumi: Vice president of the student council. Diligent exchange student who arrived from Mikawa the previous year. Has various issues with her family.
- Marga Naruze: 4th special duty officer. Black-haired six-winged Weiss Hexen. Member of the manga club.
- Margot Naito: 3rd special duty officer. Blonde-haired six-winged Schwarz Hexen. Always smiling.
- Miriam Poqou: Girl who stays in her room because she lives in a wheelchair.
- Mukai Suzu: Blind but always gives it her all. Acts as everyone's stopper.
- Tachibana Muneshige: Former Tres España 1st special duty officer. Amore. Currently working to regain his inherited name.
- Tachibana Gin: Former Tres España 3rd special duty officer. Muneshige's wife and possessor of cannon-style false arms. Fifty times.
- Mary Stuart: Half-sister of English Queen Elizabeth. Well-endowed blonde. Living with Tenzou as his future wife. Owner of Ex. Collbrande.
- Mishina Hiro: Granddaughter of the engine division's chief. Loves mechanical things. Naomasa's underclassman. Her name is pronounced Hiro, not Dai.
- Mishina Shouichi: Mishina Hiro's father. Taizou's son-in-law. Head of Kantou IZUMO.
- Satomi Yoshiyasu: Satomi Academy's student council president. Small but does not cry. Uses the god of war Righteousness.
- Ookubo Tadachika/Nagayasu: A rare Far Easterner with a double inherited name. A second year and head of the representative committee. Speaks in a fake-sounding Kansai dialect.
- Kanou: Ookubo's maid. An automaton. Head of the public morals committee. A second year.
- Date Shigezane [Narumi]: Masamune's cousin. Vice chancellor of the Date clan and uses a mobile shell named Unturning Centipede. Confident



elder sister type.

## ● Academy Officials

- Oriotri Makiko: High-speed battling teacher. Always wears a track suit.
- Sakai Tadatsugu: Musashi Ariadust Academy's president. Used to be a very able person but was demoted.
- "Musashi": Automaton that supervises the Musashi and overall commander. Her sharp comments are hard to put up with.
- Yoshinao: King of Musashi who was sent from Hexagone Française. Has a veto right toward the academy and has the authority to manage Musashi.
- Sanyou Mitsuki: Class 3-Bamboo's homeroom teacher. Looks up to Oriotorai. Somewhat sensitive and unlucky.

## ● M.H.R.R.

- Hashiba Toukichirou: M.H.R.R. Vice President and monkey-masked automaton girl. The nervous bomber type.
- Olimpia: Innocentius's older and younger stepsister. Current Pope-Chancellor.
- Matthias: Representative of M.H.R.R.'s Catholics. Student Council President. Younger brother of Chancellor and Emperor Rudolf II. Being a puppet is fun!
- Maeda Toshiie: Catholic representative. Treasurer. Samurai attendant that has become a ghost and is peacefully spending his days with his wife Matsu.
- Fukushima Masanori: Under Hashiba's direct command. Ten Spears #1. Speaks in an old-fashioned way.
- Katou Kiyomasa: Under Hashiba's direct command. Ten Spears #2. The busty blonde type and speaks politely.
- Takenaka Hanbei: Ten Spears #9. Hashiba's tactician. Carefree long-lived girl. Dies before the invasion of Mouri according to the Testament, but has also inherited the name of Kuroda Kanbei.
- Katagiri Katsumoto: Ten Spears #10. Diligent boy who fills the negotiator role among others. Used as a plaything a lot, but he won't let it get to him and will do his best like a man!

- Katou Yoshiaki: Ten Spears #4. Gold-haired, gold-winged Weiss Hexen. Speaks sharply, but surprisingly tends to act as a mediator.
- Wakisaka Yasuharu (Angie): Ten Spears #5. Black-haired, black-winged Schwarz Hexen. The carefree type, but she truly is carefree. She powers up the flow of things.
- Hachisuka Koroku: Shouroku. God of war pilot of the Hidamari Genbu. The cool kid of the Ten Spears.
- Kani Saizou: Extremely high probability of people misreading her name. The energetic aide to the Ten Spears. Fukushima's underclassman. Nickname: Kanitama.

### ● P.A. Oda

- Sassa Narimasa: One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Delinquent and assault type. But methodical.
- Shibata Katsuie: One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Athletic type. Very troublesome after his recent marriage.
- Fuwa Mitsuharu: P.A. Oda's local anti-Sviet Rus treasurer. Her, Toshiie, and Narimasa are known as the Triumvirate.
- Oichi: Shibata Katsuie's wife. Gentle berserker.
- Mori Nagayoshi: Manliest young fellow in P.A. Oda. His head spins at the instant of impact.
- Takigawa Ichimasu: P.A. Oda ninja commander who excels at castle building and ship operation.

### ● Date Clan

- Date Masamune: Head of the Date clan. Inherits the power of the Dragon God. Chancellor and student council president of the Date clan.
- Katakura Kojuurou: Vice president of the Date clan. Full of intense highs and lows.
- Yoshihime: Masamune's mother. Half demonic long-lived and half human. Principal of Sendai Date Academy.

### ● Mogami Clan

- Mogami Yoshiaki: Betrayal-loving daimyo known as the Fox of Ushuu. Shrewd leader who unified frigid Mogami in a single generation.
- Shakenobe: The Mouse that follows Yoshiaki-sama, mon!

## ● Hexagone Française

- Louis XIV: Hexagone Française's chancellor. Refreshing young man known as the Roi-Soleil. Has divine blood.
- Mouri Terumoto: Hexagone Française's student council president. Delinquent type. Destined to be Musashi's enemy as leader of the Western Army.
- Henri of the Three Musketeers: Female combat-style automaton. Acts as the leader and as Terumoto's bodyguard. Uses large remote-controlled swords.
- Armand of the Three Musketeers: Male combat-style automaton. Uses broad-range gravitational control.
- Reine de Garou: Turenne. Hexagone Française's vice chancellor. Mitotsudaira's mom. All-around giant breasts.
- Mitotsudaira's Father: The Reine des Garous's husband. A victim who is full of happiness and readily cries. Not so much passive as always under attack. 24 days.
- Bernard: A mercenary commander from M.H.R.R., but an old man who inherited the name of someone who betrayed his home nation as a Protestant and moved from battlefield to battlefield, but is actually a Celestial Dragon and siding with Hexagone Française. It's complicated.

## ● Houjou

- Houjou Ujinao: Chancellor and student council vice president of the Houjou Association of Indian States. A demonic long-lived, but has an automaton body.
- Kotarou: Ninja girl Mouse that accompanies Ujinao. Skilled but gets treated like a child.

## ● Sanada



- Sanada Nobuyuki: Sanada's Student Council President and Chancellor. Unclear if he's important or not and unclear if he's strong or not, but he is the type to live a long time.
- Sanada Masayuki: Nobuyuki's daddy. Principal of Sanada Academy.
- Unno Rokuro: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #7. Eccentric dancer. Uses a dancing style of swordplay.
- Kakei Juuzou: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #10. Tall skinny man who uses a remote-controlled shooting technique.
- Miyoshi Isa: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #4. AKA Isa Nyuudou. Girl who uses a remote-controlled god of war.
- Anayama Kosuke: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #5. Looks like a nice guy. Uses ninja techniques.
- Yuri Kamanosuke: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #6. Specializes in sword fighting.
- Nezu Jinpachi: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #8. Specializes in sniping.
- Mochizuki Yukitada: Ten Braves #9. Automaton who uses explosion spells.

# Glossary

・御館の乱【おたてのらん】:上杉家内における謙信死後の跡目相続争い。上杉・景勝と長尾・景虎が争い、景勝が勝利した。

## か行

- ・改易:お家取り潰しのこと。
- ・外燃拝気:自分の外に蓄積された拝気のこと。流体燃料などが該当。
- ・旧派【カトリック】:古くから存在するTsirhcの主流。
- ・行事:教導院が各学期中などにこなさなければいけない儀式や試験など学業を示す。これを遂行しなければ対外的政治行為などは行えない。
- ・教導院:学校施設のこと。実質上の政軍中心部。分校が多く存在する。
- ・教譜:神や聖譜を信奏する組織。集団。
- ・極東:重奏統合騒乱の後、神州をこう呼ぶ。
- ・K.P.A.Italia:安芸諸国連合+イタリア都市連合のこと。
- ・賢鉱石、賢水:流体を含んだ鉱石、水。流体燃料としても使用可能。
- ・校則法:聖連が取り決めた教導院間の基本法。

## さ行

- ・暫定議会:武蔵において、生徒会や総長連合、委員会の官僚となる大人達の組織。
- ・清らか大市【サンメルカド】:三征西班牙のブランド。
- ・Shaja【シャージャ】:ムラサイ圏における“了解”の意。本来は勇気を示す語の表音。
- ・Jud.【ジャッジ/ジャッジメント】:咎人用の“応答”“了解”の意。
- ・重奏世界:かつて神州のコピーを置いた異空間のこと。地脈制御で保たれていた。
- ・重奏統合争乱:重奏世界が崩壊した際に生じた重奏世界側住人と現実世界側(神州)住人の戦争。重奏世界側が勝利して神州は暫定支配を受ける。
- ・重奏領域:落ちてきた重奏世界の神州が、砕けながら現実側に合一した箇所。
- ・襲名:歴史再現のために適格者が歴史上の人物を襲名すること。
- ・術式:流体を加工することで空間中に奇跡

## あ行

- ・黒金侍【アイゼンリッター】:M.H.R.R.改派領邦の主企業。
- ・ArchsArt:“大属の芸術”。英国の主企業。
- ・安土城:P.A.Odaが有する巨大航空戦艦。
- ・尼子家:元IZUMOの地。毛利と六護式仏蘭西によって滅亡。
- ・天津乞神令教導院【あまつごいしんれいきょうどういん】:黎明の時代に存在した初期の教導院。学問の場というより、導きの前線基地だった。
- ・有明:関東IZUMOによる武蔵専用浮きドック。
- ・アルマダの海戦:英国と三征西班牙の間に生じた海戦。三征西班牙が英国上陸を画策したが壊滅する。
- ・出雲産業座(IZUMO):極東最大規模の企業座。極東の神社の総本山で武蔵の建造を担った企業。
- ・英国【イングランド】:浮遊島を用いており、極東の土地や大名を支配していない。
- ・ヴェストファーレン条約:三十年戦争などの講和条約。
- ・H.R.R.M.:“神聖騎士団鉄工会”。M.H.R.R.旧派領邦の主企業。
- ・女神万歳【エウロパ】:六護式仏蘭西の主企業。
- ・六護式仏蘭西【エグザゴンフランセーズ】:毛利家+フランスのこと。
- ・王賜剣【エクスカリバー】:一型と二型がある。
- ・ATELL:流体の最小単位。術式に使用する。
- ・見下し魔山【エーデルブロッケン】:魔術ブランド。本社所在不明。
- ・M.H.R.R.:羽柴家+神聖ローマ帝国のこと。
- ・七部六仙道【オアト】:中国の仙道を基礎とした教譜。
- ・奥州:東北地域のこと。東側を伊達家。西側を最上家が治める。
- ・奥州藤原(平泉):奥州の南側にある長寿族の隠れ里。
- ・大返し【おおかえし】:信長暗殺の際、毛利攻めを行っていた羽柴が全軍をとって返した。二〇〇キロほどの道のりを、十日弱で走破したムチャ行軍。



では禁止。

・**超祝福艦隊**:アルマダ海戦用の三征西班牙の艦隊。最新鋭艦で構成。

・**Tsirhc**:神の子を長に据えた教譜。聖譜を信奏する。

・**Tes.【テス／テストメント】**:“応答”“了解”の意。

・**通し道歌**:江戸時代に極東に発生する童謡の試作型。

・**三征西班牙【トレスエスパンア】**:大内、大友家+スペインのこと。ポルトガルも併合中。

## な行

・**内燃拝気**:自分の中にため込んだ拝気のこと。

・**ノヴゴロド**:露西亞の西端の大商業都市。浮上都市だが、雷帝イヴァン四世の大粛清で死者の都市となった。

## は行

・**拝気**:人間が一時間存在するために必要な流体。3600ATELL。術式の消費ATELL換算単位。

・**花園**:英国にて作られた人工末世研究用の空間。

・**範鋼**:清のブランド。頑丈だけどやや荒い。

・**P.A.Oda**:織田家+オスマン。

・**非衰退調律進行**:黎明の時代に起きた、聖譜や重奏世界を作った運動。

・**秀次事件**:羽柴の甥にして次代を任されようとしていた、秀次が、羽柴の怒りをかけて自害に追い込まれた事件。理由は不明で、連座によって側室の駒姫までもが自害することになる。

・**表示枠**:各教譜の基本加護を使用するための術式デバイス。

・**改派【プロテスタント】**:旧派腐敗からの脱却と時代に合わせたTsirhcの新流。

・**機械仕掛けの明星【フィーノアルバ】**:K.P.A.Italiaのブランド。発条式を売り物とする。

・**武家諸法度**:松平家が江戸幕府を興した後に発布する法律。武家のあり方を決めたが、一国一城や、跡継ぎ無い場合は改易など、中央集権化を進める内容。

・**武神**:人が同化して動く巨大な人型機械。

・**文禄の役**:羽柴の朝鮮侵攻。第一回目のこと。

・**白砂台座**:出雲産業座の神社系ブランド。

・**人工末世**:英国の“花園”に末世研究用で作られた地脈の歪みの圧縮。

・**神格武装**:通常の武装とは違い、特有の能力を持つ武装。

・**神州**:極東のかつての呼び方。

・**清武田**:中国と武田家の合一。

・**神道**:極東の教譜。極東の神々を信奏し、神奏術を用いる。

・**上越露西亞【スヴィエートルーシ】**:上杉家+露西亞のこと。

・**聖協**:聖譜協奏派。上越露西亞で独自発展した旧派。

・**聖術**:Tsirhc系の術式。旧派は聖譜や聖者関係、改派は聖譜のみから力を導く。

・**生徒会**:各教導院の内務、外務などを行う組織。

・**聖譜**:前地球時代の歴史を記した歴史書。七組+抄本がある。

・**聖譜記述**:聖譜の機能により、前地球時代の歴史が百年先まで自動更新される。が、一六四八年の記述を最後に更新が停止している。

・**聖譜顕装**:聖譜の持つ能力を転用するための武装。

・**精霊術**:意志を持った流体とも言える精霊に話し掛け、力を借りる原始的な術式。

・**聖連**:聖譜連盟。歴史再現を主導するための組織。

・**奏者**:各教譜の信徒。

・**総長連合**:総長を長に、各教導院の警備など、実働と指揮を行う組織。

・**卒業**:極東以外の国は無期限制。極東は十八歳卒業制。

## た行

・**代演**:術式発動に拝気を使用する代わりに、神の喜ぶものを奉納すること。

・**大罪武装**:人間の大罪をモチーフに作られた大量破壊武装。

・**ダンハイ**:教譜の一つ。輪廻転生を主軸としている。

・**地脈**:空間を構成する流体の流れる経路の内、太いもの。

・**地脈炉**:地脈から流体を抽出精製する炉。地脈の変異を起こしやすく、爆発すると数キロ範囲が消滅して不安定化するためTsirhc教譜

・**歴史再現**:聖譜記述を人々が再現して世界の流れを保つこと。

・**奉納**:神に、神の喜ぶものや内燃拌気を納めること。献納。

## ま行

・**走狗【マウス】**:神道教譜と奏者の仲介をする霊獣型デバイス。他教譜では走徒とも言う。

・**魔術**:欧州で絶賛迫害中の民間術式。

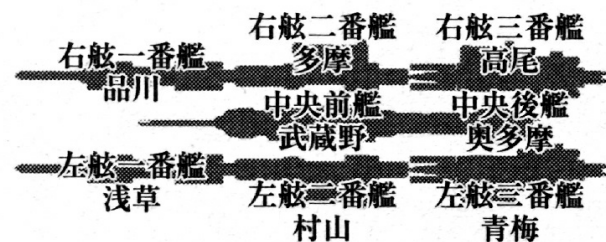
・**末世**:この世の終わり。聖譜の歴史記述が途切れる一六四八年のこと。

・**帝**:神格者、京にて神器による地脈制御を行っているとされる。俗世に関与しない。

・**三河**:元信公の地脈炉暴走崩壊で消滅。

・**水戸**:奥州の南、江戸の北。ミツダイラの所領地。

・**武蔵**:航空都市艦。極東に許された唯一の独立領土。



・**武蔵アリアダスト学院**:武蔵上、奥多摩に存在する極東の代表校。

・**矛盾許容**:この世界の基礎能。あらゆる物理法則の同時存在を叶える。

・**ムラサイ**:Tsirhcとは別に聖譜を信奏する後発派。

## ら行

・**竜属**:竜のこと。精霊系の天竜と、獣系の地竜がいて、天竜を上位とする。ゲルマン侵攻の歴史再現で覇を唱えたものの、敗北。今は各地に散っている。

・**流体**:矛盾許容型の空間構成要素。

・**流体燃料**:燃料として精製された流体。外燃拌気や、流体駆動器に用いられる。

・**流体駆動器**:流体の空間変異力を用いた駆動器。効果は内部の紋章などによって変化する。

・**流体炉**:空間から流体を抽出精製する炉。地脈炉より出力は低いが比較的安全。

・**竜脈炉**:莫大量の流体を爆発させ、半径数キロを消滅させる爆弾。羽柴が有する。

・**黎明の時代**:聖譜成立以前の時代のこと。

# A

- Academy: An educational facility. Used as the center of political and military power. Tend to have many branch schools.
- Academy Rules: The basic laws upheld between academies. Agreed to by the Testament Union.
- Age of Dawn: The age before the Testament was established.
- Amako clan: Former IZUMO land. Destroyed by Mouri and Hexagone Française.
- Anti-Decline Pro-Tuning: The action taken during the Age of Dawn that led to the creation of the Testament and Harmonic World.
- Apocalypse: The end of the world. 1648 when the Testament's history descriptions end.
- ArchsArt: England's primary corporation.
- Ariake: Floating dock for the Musashi provided by Kantou IZUMO.
- Armada battle: A naval battle fought between England and Tres España. Tres España planned to land on England but their fleet was destroyed.
- Artificial Apocalypse: A compressed ley line distortion created in England's Avalon to research the Apocalypse.
- ATELL: The smallest unit of ether. Used for spells.
- Avalon: A space created in England to research the artificial Apocalypse.
- Azuchi Castle: P.A. Oda's giant aerial warship.



## **B**

- Blessings: The amount of ether needed for a human to exist for one hour. 3600 ATELL. Conversion unit for a spell's ATELL consumption.
- Bunroku Campaign: Hashiba's invasion of Korea. The first one.

# C

- Catholic: The old mainstream version of Tsrhc.
- Chancellor's Officers: An organization led by the chancellor which leads the academy and performs work such as defense.
- Change of Rank: Having one's clan taken away.
- Contradiction Allowance: The foundational ability of the world. Allows the simultaneous existence of all sorts of physical laws.

## D

- Divine States: Former name of the Far East.
- Divine Weapon: A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.
- Divinely Ordained Prayer Academies: The original academies that existed during the Age of Dawn. More a guiding frontline base than a place of learning.
- Dragon Line Reactor: A bomb that uses a runaway ley line reactor to destroy a wide area.
- Dragon Races: The dragons. There are Celestial Dragons which are spirits and Terrestrial Dragons which are beasts and the Celestial Dragons are of a higher level. They dominated during the history recreation of the Germanic invasions, but ultimately lost. They are now scattered across the land.
- Dunhi: A religion. Focused on reincarnation.



## E

- Edel Brocken: Magic brand. Location of headquarters unknown.
- Eisenritter: Primary corporation of M.H.R.R.'s Protestant principalities.
- Emperor: A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.
- England: Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.
- Ether: Component that makes up contradiction-allowing space.
- Ether Engine: An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.
- Ether Fuel: Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.
- Ether Reactor: A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.
- Europa: Hexagone Française's primary corporation.
- Excalibur: Has a first and second version.
- External Blessings: Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

## F

- Fan Gang: Qing brand. Durable but a bit rough.
- Far East: Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.
- Fino Alba: K.P.A. Italian brand. Their use of springs is their selling point.

## G

- God of War: A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.
- Graduation: No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.
- Grande y Felicísima Armada: Tres España's fleet for the Armada battle. Made up of cutting-edge ships.
- Great Return: When Hashiba returned with all his troops while attacking Mouri during Nobunaga's assassination. The rushed march covered about 200 km in less than ten days.



# H

- Harmonic Territory: Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.
- Harmonic Unification War: A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.
- Harmonic World: A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.
- Hexagone Française: Mouri clan + France.
- Hidetsugu Incident: Hidetsugu, Hashiba's nephew who was going to be left in charge during the next generation, earned Hashiba's anger and was forced to commit suicide. The reason is unknown, but his concubine Komahime had to commit suicide with him.
- History Recreation: Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.
- Holy Spells: Tsirhc spells. The Catholics are related to the Testament and holy individuals while the Protestants derive power only from the Testament.
- H.R.R.M.: Holy Knights Ironworks Guild. Primary corporation of M.H.R.R.'s Catholic principalities.

# I

- Inherited Name: The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.
- Internal Blessings: blessings stored within oneself.
- IZUMO: The Far East's largest corporation. The headquarters for Far Eastern shrines and the corporation that built the Musashi.

## J

- Judge/Judgment: Means “understood”. Used by criminals.

# K

- K.P.A. Italia: Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.



# L

- Laws for the Samurai Clans: Laws established after the Matsudaira clan established the Edo Shogunate. It determined the status of the samurai clans, but it centralized power by declaring a 'Change of Rank' if a clan or castle had no heir.
- Ley Line: The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.
- Ley Line Reactor: A reactor that extracts and refines ether from ley lines. Can easily cause ley line mutations and destroy everything within several kilometers if they explode. Due to their instability, they are banned by the Tsirhc religion.
- Logismo Oplo: Weapons of mass destruction created on the motif of the seven deadly sins.

# M

- Magic: Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.
- M.H.R.R.: Hashiba clan + Holy Roman Empires.
- Mikawa: Destroyed by the collapse of Lord Motonobu's ley line reactor.
- Mito: South of Oushuu and north of Edo. Mitotsudaira's territory.
- Mlasi: A later non-Tsirhc religion that also worships the Testament.
- Mouse: A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.
- Musashi: Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.

[First Starboard Ship – Shinagawa/Second Starboard Ship – Tama/Third Starboard Ship – Takao/First Central Ship – Musashino/Back Central Ship – Okutama/First Port Ship – Asakusa/Second Port Ship – Murayama/Third Port Ship – Oume]

- Musashi Ariadust Academy: The Far East's representative academy which exists on Okutama of Musashi.
- Musician: A religion's worshiper.

# N

- Novgorod: A large trade city on the western end of Russia. It is a floating city, but became a city of the dead after Ivan IV the Terrible's purge.

# O

- Oat: A religion based on China's sages.
- Offering: Providing a god with something they will enjoy or Internal Blessings.
- Official Events: Refers to the ceremonies, exams, *etc.* that an academy must complete during each term. If these are not completed, the academy may not take part in any external politics.
- Orei Metallo/Nero: Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.
- Orthodox: The Orthodox Concerto religion. Sviet Rus's unique branch of Catholicism.
- Oushuu: The Tohoku region. The Date clan rules the east and the Mogami clan rules the west.
- Oushuu Fujiwara (Hiraizumi): A hidden village of the long-lived in southern Oushuu.



## P

- P.A. Oda: Oda clan + Ottomans.
- Peace of Westphalia: The peace treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War.
- Protestant: A new style of Tsirhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.
- Provisional Council: Group of adults who act as bureaucrats toward Musashi's student council, chancellor's officers, and student committees.

# Q

- Qing-Takeda: Combination of China and the Takeda clan.

# R

- Religion: Organizations or groups that worship a god or the Testament.

# S

- San Mercado: Tres Españan brand.
- Shaja: Used in Mlasi regions and means “understood”. Originally meant “courage”.
- Shinto: Far Eastern religion. Worships the Far Eastern gods and uses divine music spells.
- Shirasago Enterprises: IZUMO’s shrine brand.
- Siege of Otate: Conflict over the succession of the Uesugi clan after Kenshin’s death. Uesugi Kagekatsu and Nagao Kagetora fought and Kagekatsu won.
- Sign Frame: Spell device needed to use each religion’s basic protection.
- Song of Passage: Prototype of a fairy tale created in the Far East during the Edo period.
- Spell: Causing a miracle in a certain space by processing ether.
- Spirit Spell: Primitive spells used by talking to and borrowing the power of spirits, which are ether with a will of its own.
- Student Council: The organization that handles an academy’s domestic and foreign affairs.
- Substitution: Offering something to please a god instead of using Blessings to activate a spell.
- Sviet Rus: Uesugi clan + Russia.



# T

- Tes/Testament: Means “understood”.
- Testament: A history book that provides the history of the earth’s previous age. There are seven pairs and excerpts.
- Testament Descriptions: History of the earth’s previous age that is automatically updated by the Testament. However, it stopped updating after the description for 1648.
- Testament Union: An organization meant to lead the history recreation.
- Testamenta Arma: Weapons that use the ability of the Testaments.
- Tres España: Oouchi and Ootomo clans + Spain. Currently includes Portugal.
- Tsrhc: A religion which places the Son of God at the top. Worships the Testament.

# World

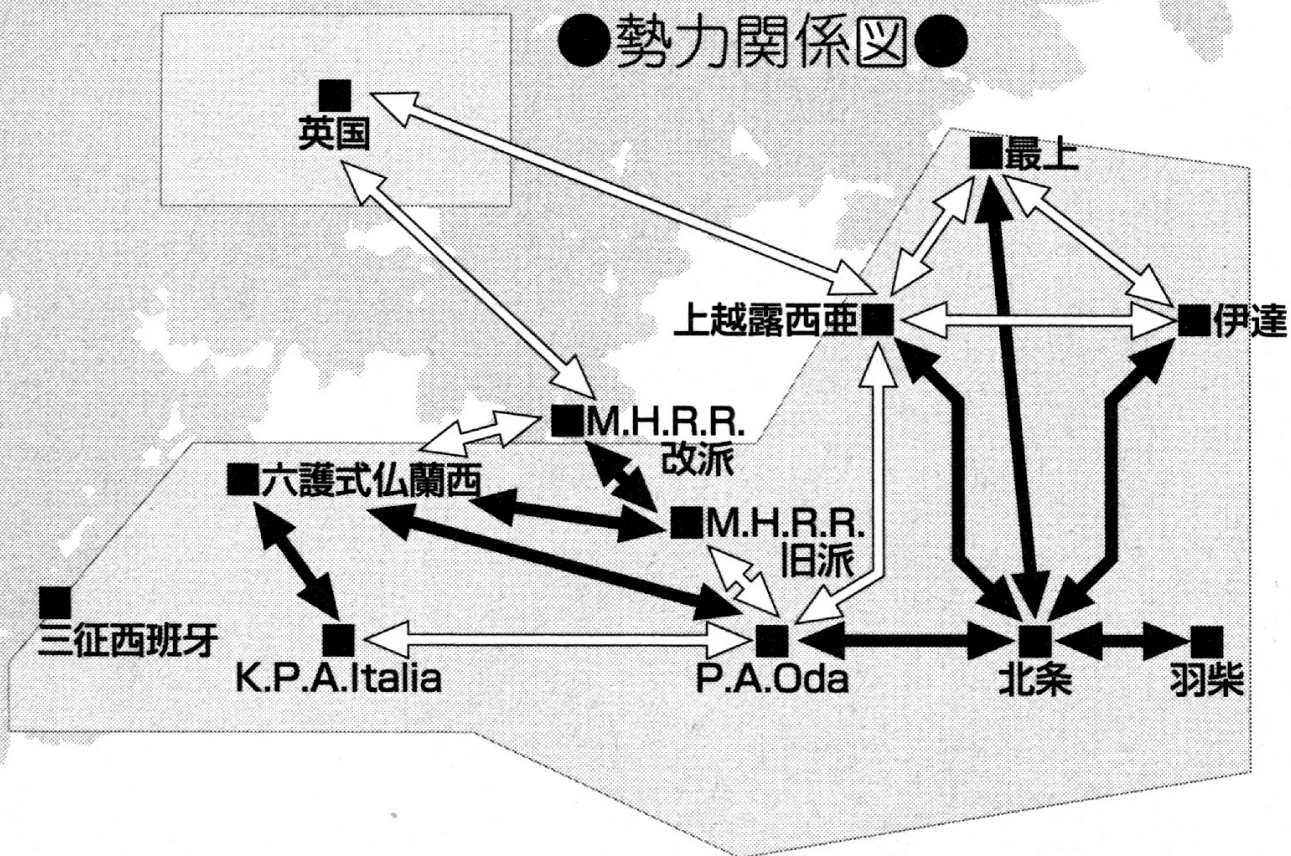
## ●実況通神呼び名一覧●

- ・あずま：東
- ・あさま：浅間・智
- ・いんび：伊藤・健児（イトケン）
- ・俺：葵・トーリ
- ・金マル：マルゴット・ナイト
- ・義：里見・義康
- ・傷有り：メアリ・スチュアート
- ・銀狼：ネイト・ミトツダイラ
- ・現役娘：人狼女王
- ・賢姉様：葵・喜美
- ・481：三科・翔一
- ・立花夫：立花・宗茂
- ・立花嫁：立花・闇
- ・煙草女：直政
- ・十Z0：点蔵・クロスユナイト
- ・蜻蛉切：本多・二代
- ・粘着王：ネンジ
- ・83：ハッサン・フルブシ
- ・貧従士：アデーレ・バルフェット
- ・副会長：本多・正純
- ・ベル：向井・鈴
- ・ホラ子：ホライゾン・アリアダスト
- ・●画：マルガ・ナルゼ
- ・○ペ屋：ハイディ・オーゲザヴァラー
- ・347：三科・大
- ・未熟者：トゥーサン・ネシンバラ
- ・武蔵王：ヨシナオ
- ・眼鏡：シェイクスピア
- ・礼賛者：御広敷・銀二
- ・労働者：ノリキ
- ・不退転：伊達・成実
- ・景綱君：片倉・小十郎
- ・牙：鬼庭・綱元
- ・留守居：留守・政景
- ・三立申：滝川・一益
- ・大先輩：柴田・勝家
- ・お12：御市
- ・百合花：佐々・成政
- ・お前田：前田・利家
- ・ふわあ：不破・光治
- ・モリー：森・長可
- ・九尾娘：最上・義光
- ・繁子：本庄・繁長
- ・かげV：上杉・景勝
- ・朝の部：斉藤・朝信
- ・長安定：大久保・忠隣
- ・CAN：加納
- ・しとお：福島・正則
- ・巨正：加藤・清正
- ・□□凸：片桐・且元
- ・黒竹：竹中・半兵衛
- ・きめえ：加藤・嘉明
- ・AnG：脇坂・安治
- ・6：蜂須賀・小六
- ・杏里：アンリ
- ・ある男：アルマン
- ・超正義：大谷・吉継
- ・成成成：石田・三成

## 簡易あらすじ

“よし、じゃあ僕が解りやすく説明をしようか。いいかい？ この世界は今、闇の勢力が力を強くしている時代なんだ。人々が歴史再現などをやっている中や、裏側では、世界を掌握しようという闇の枢機卿が暗躍し、極東に生まれるというメシアを狙っているんだ。対抗するには光の十六戦士が覚醒……、おっと、ここから先はちょっと危険だから言えないね。だけど今、君の目の前にいる人が真理を掴む者であるということを知っていてくれれば充分だ。何かあったらすぐに助けにいくことを約束しよう。ただ、気をつけた方がよい。君はもう知ってしまったんだ。やつらの手は陰湿でね。既にメディアは彼らに掌握され、僕達が第三覚醒にまで至るような情報にたどり着けないようにしている。フ、僕かい？ 僕は未だ第一の覚醒にしか至っていない未熟者でね……。ほら、この右腕の傷がその戦いのときのものだ。あの戦闘では、こちらにも犠牲が出てしまって、第六の男が次代に全てを預けなくてはいけなくなってしまったんだ……。”……ってトゥーサン、一体中等部の時から何書いてんだ君は。——で、これで武蔵の現状説明とか大丈夫？ 添削で送るファイルを間違えた？ 声出して読むな？ あはは素直になろうよトゥーサン！ 僕を笑わせたかったんだろ!? この同人誌、入手できてなかったから超有り難いなあ！ じゃあ続き読むよ？

## ●勢力関係図●



■極東（武蔵）

- 三征西班牙
- K.P.A. Italia
- 英国
- M.H.R.R. 改派
- M.H.R.R. 旧派
- 六護式仏蘭西
- P.A. Oda
- 北条
- 伊達
- 上越露西亞
- 最上

⇄ 協働  
→ 敵対

無矢印は放置  
または緩い警戒

## ●武蔵の今後●



「姉ちゃん! 姉ちゃん! ネシンバラがあらすじとして役に立たねえんだけど、俺達これからどーすんの!?!」



「フフフ愚弟、つまり各勢力入り乱れた小田原征伐と諸戦を、小田原舞台に相対戦で行うの。そして権益を取り合おうって話ね。巴里では羽柴勢が巴里水没を狙ってるからそっちもなかなか大変よ?」



## The Story So Far:

“Okay, I’ll explain everything in a nice simple way. Listen. The world has reached an age in which dark forces are gathering strength. While the people are advancing the history recreation, the Dark Cardinal with designs of world domination is plotting behind the scenes to target the Messiah who it is said will be born in the Far East. The only hope of opposing him is for the 16 Warriors of Light to awaken and-...oops, it would be too dangerous to say anymore. You only need to understand that the person standing before you has a firm grasp on the truth. I promise to come save you if anything happens. But you need to be careful. Because now you know. Their methods are devious. They already control the media so that we will never find the information needed to reach the Third Awakening. Heh. Me? I am a mere novice who has only reached the First Awakening... See, this scar on my right arm is from that battle. We lost someone in that fight. The Sixth Man was forced to leave everything in the hands of the next generation...” ...Toussaint, what were you writing since middle school? And are you sure this is how you want to describe the Musashi’s situation? You attached the wrong file when sending this to me? You want me to stop reading it aloud? Ah ha ha. Be more honest with yourself, Toussaint! You were hoping to make me laugh, weren’t you!? I really appreciate it since I didn’t have a chance to acquire this doujinshi! Okay, let’s read the rest.

## Divine Chat Screenname List:

- Azuma: Azuma
- Asama: Asama Tomo
- Obscene: Itou Kenji (Itoken)
- Me: Aoi Toori
- Gold Mar: Margot Naito
- Righteousness: Satomi Yoshiyasu
- Scarred: Mary Stuart
- Silver Wolf: Nate Mitosudaira
- Still Got It: Reine des Garous
- Wise Sister: Aoi Kimi

- 481: Mishina Shouichi
- Tachibana Husband: Tachibana Muneshige
- Tachibana Wife: Tachibana Gin
- Smoking Girl: Naomasa
- 10ZO: Tenzou Crossunite
- Tonbokiri: Honda Futayo
- Sticky King: Nenji
- 83: Hassan Furubushi
- Flat Vassal: Adele Balfette
- Vice President: Honda Masazumi
- Bell: Mukai Suzu
- Hori-ko: Horizon Ariadust
- Mar-Ga: Marga Naruze
- Marube-ya: Heidi Augesvarer
- 847: Mishina Hiro
- Novice: Toussaint Neshinbara
- Musashi King: Yoshinao
- Four Eyes: Shakespeare
- Worshipper: Ohiroshiki Ginji
- Laborer: Noriki
- Unturning: Date Narumi
- Kagetsuna-kun: Katakura Kojuurou
- Fang: Oniniwa Tsunamoto
- Caretaker: Rusu Makikage
- Taki: Takigawa Ichimasu
- Great Upperclassmen: Shibata Katsuie
- O12: Oichi
- Lily Flower: Sassa Narimasa
- Omaeda: Maeda Toshiie
- Fuwaa: Fuwa Mitsuharu
- Mory: Mori Nagayoshi
- Nine Tail Girl: Mogami Yosahiaki
- Shigeko: Honjou Shigenaga
- KageV: Uesugi Kagekatsu

- Tomo-no-Bu: Saitou Tomonobu
- Nagaya-Stable: Ookubo Tadachika
- CAN: Kanou
- Llaf: Fukushima Masanori
- Kiyo-Massive: Katou Kiyomasa
- □□凸: Katagiri Katsumoto
- Kuro-Take: Takenaka Hanbei
- Kimee: Katou Yoshiaki
- AnG: Wakisaka Yasuharu
- 6: Hachisuka Koroku
- An-Ri: Henri
- Ar-Man: Armand
- Super Justice: Ootani Yoshitsugu
- Nari Nari Nari: Ishida Mitsunari

Far Eastern Powers:

[Same map as before, but with Kantou Powers replaced with Houjou]

Relationships Between the Major Powers:

[Same as 4-A, but with Kantou Powers replaced with Houjou]

Musashi's Plans:

Toori: Sis! Sis! Neshinbara is useless at explaining the story so far, so what are we about to do!?

Kimi: Heh heh heh. Foolish brother, the Siege of Odawara and some other battles involving a jumble of different forces are being fought using duels at Odawara. And we're competing over rights. At Paris, Hashiba is trying to flood Paris and that sounds like a big deal as well.

Horizon:Volume 6C School Rules

# Study



## ●小田原征伐(おさらい)●



「姉ちゃん! 姉ちゃん! 何か前の小田原征伐の紹介、頭からスポン! って抜けててスポン! スポ——ン!!」



「フフフ、スポ弟、小田原征伐の地勢だけど、大体こういうことになってるから憶えておくのね」



「おお! やっぱ前と変わらねえな! でも、忘れてたな! どっちだよ俺!」



「おーい、どうでもいいけど、まだまだこれからだから、観客としては気を抜くんじゃないわよ? 愚弟」

## The Siege of Odawara (Review)

Toori: Sis! Sis! Your introduction of the Siege of Odawara just slipped from my mind! Slipped right on out! Sliiiip!!

Kimi: Heh heh heh. Slippery brother, this is the general lay of the land for the Siege of Odawara, so make sure you remember it.

[Map is same as the study from 6-B.]

Toori: Ohh! It hasn't changed at all! But I'd forgotten it! Which is it, me!?

Kimi: Hey, it doesn't really matter, but this is only getting started. Stay focused as a spectator, foolish brother.

# **Chapter 46: Relatives on the Bench**

## 第四十六章

### 『縁台上の縁者達』

うっわ  
これ美味しい！  
これ何ですかこれ！  
配点（四八〇円）



Wow

*This is tasty!*

*What is it!?*

### **Point Allocation (480 Yen)**

The zenzai cost 480 yen.

Kani's monthly allowance was 3000 yen. From that perspective, it was a steep price.

But she was sure her parents would let it slide with no more than a bitter smile.

After all, this 480 yen was allowing her an unbelievable experience.

*...I'm talking with Mogami Yoshiaki-sama...!*

A first-year name inheritor like her would not normally have the opportunity to speak with a major daimyo who helped lead the Warring States period. It might be a simple enough thing for the daimyo, but their environment and the timing would not allow it.

But this was different. While Kani drank tea and ate delicious food...

"And that Shigenaga who is fighting here is surprisingly insensitive. She should really be cleverer on the battlefield, but she looks at everything so straightforwardly."

"Is being straightforward a bad thing?"

"If all you do is go straight forward, you'll run into things, right? You know how to deflect forces, don't you?"

"Yes! I do! So I need to focus on that!?"

"What a clever girl."

With that, Yoshiaki gave Kani a dumpling.

Kani knew not to hesitate when a superior gave her something.

"Thank you!"



“Good, good. If only Yoshiyasu was as honest as you.”

“Is that your son!?”

“No, she is the Satomi Student Council President who is also here. You could say she wears her stubbornness like clothing.”

“I bet she’s just shy because you’re such an honored figure!”

Yoshiaki narrowed her eyes at that, but her eyebrows lowered a little.

“You are a good girl.”

She rubbed Kani’s head and then asked a sudden question.

“Do you think you can win?”

“No! I was told to watch the flow of battle!”

“And what does that mean?”

“I don’t know! So please tell me!”

“Now that is a tricky question.”

Yoshiaki laughed. It was a “ko ko” from the throat.

*She is wonderful, thought Kani. My mom and dad run a greengrocer, my mom is kind of chubby, and my dad is kind of skinny. Lady Yoshiaki is an adult just like them, but she’s clearly on a different level.*

But she was her mom and dad’s pride and joy and she had finally come this far. Her parents had signed her name inheritance application while saying they wanted a better life for her, so she wanted to give them more than just her thanks. She wanted to bring back some incredible stories to tell them.

And she knew she was about to be a part of an incredible story.

She could tell her upperclassmen about it too. So...

“I’ll do my best!”

“Yes, you will.”

“Yes!”

*I need to experience some things that will make a good story, she thought*

while looking down at her bowl of zenzai.

...Ah.

She had gotten so excited she accidentally ate all of the *mochi* first.

...Ahhhhh.

Grabbing the adzuki beans with the chopsticks was difficult, but she did not want it to get cold.

However, Yoshiaki suddenly turned around and spoke into the café.

“Excuse me...you, automaton. I have an additional order.”

“You mean meeeeeeeeeee!?”

“Sorry about the trouble so soon after you arrived, but I would like zenzai for both of us. Oh, but just extra *mochi* for her.”

“My zenzai is hoooooooooooooooooooooot! And the *mochi* are fried nice and crispyyyyyyyyy!?! Ohhhhhh! Time to roast these *mochi* to deeeeeeeeeeeath!”

“I’m glad the service here is so good.”

Hearing that exchange, Kani looked up and saw Yoshiaki smiling at her.

“Are you sure!?”

“Seeing you eat it made me want to try some. Odawara is a southern rice-producing region, so seeing how its rice compares to Mogami’s would be worthwhile for the upcoming trade route. Also...”

Also...

“I can’t just have you wait for me before we fight. So after we eat this, let’s finish our tea and begin our duel.”

“...Testament!”

Kani nodded. It was almost 1:10 PM.

Back at the academy, it would have been the lunch break.

Humans would react to a loud noise in one of two ways: cover their ears or

ignore it.

Masazumi chose them both.

She was to the northeast of Odawara Castle. When facing west, the forest and hill were right in front of her and the mountains of the Izu Peninsula were visible beyond that.

Several curtains were set up as partitions and the Musashi group was holding a festival there.

Stands were lined up and the scent of cooking food hung in the air.

*...Now, what to do?*

“Hey, Vice President! Can you hear me!?”

“Yes, I can hear you, I can hear you. What were you saying? That your lunch was good? What’d you eat?”

“I’m running!”

*Ookubo’s character sure has changed, she thought.*

Masazumi listened to the periodic reports from the sign frame following her around and she view the prices displayed on the stands. Those prices were reduced by wartime support taken from the Student Council’s budget, but...

*...It’s all so expensive...*

She could get this much food at the Blue Thunder for free because “we’d just have to throw it out otherwise”.

No, she did not eat much, so *she was not hoping for much*. But when she compared the prices...

*...This is not good.*

Masazumi thought, *I need to learn what it’s like to be one of the common people.*

After all, most of the common people ate more expensive food than she did. The common people did not live lives of searching out free food and being willing to collapse from hunger if they could not find any.

As a politician, she needed to look at things from the common people's viewpoint.

"Hey, Ookubo. How much do you spend on lunch?"

"Huh!? About 1500 yen!?"

Masazumi closed the sign frame. She felt she had to.

She looked up at the displayed prices and saw a "50 yen" display.

*...Ookubo, you can't do that.*

For Masazumi, it was the difference between free and 50 yen. For Ookubo, it was the difference between 1500 yen and 50 yen.

Ookubo had the greater difference.

Besides, 1500 yen could buy two or three brand new books. Or 15 used ones.

*What are you doing, Ookubo? You can't be like that. Yes...*

"Hey, Tsukinowa, you agree, don't you?"

"Maa?"

*That sounded like a question, but the response means he agrees, right?* she concluded.

Meanwhile, Adele and Mitotsudaira approached from the right with roast tofu on skewers.

"Vice President, how is the Representative Committee Head doing?"

"Oh, she seemed fine. And she ate an expensive lunch. She said it was 1500 yen."

"That's crazy...!"

Someone agreed with her. She decided to ignore that Mitotsudaira looked the other way. But then Heidi approached from the other side.

"Oh, Masazumi. I heard from the Sagami merchants that...Houjou Ujiteru, was it? That he lost to Sviet Rus's Honjou Shigenaga."

"I already knew that, so I'm not paying."

“Dammit!”

Heidi threw her receipts-and-payments sign frame to the ground and tried to pick it back up, but it broke.

“Ah,” she said. “Pay for that, Masazumi! It broke because of you!”

“Tsukinowa, did you get a video of that? We’ll use that in court.”

“Maa.”

“Dammit! The Mouse is making this so much harder than last year!”

“Anyway,” said Mitotsudaira while buying a skewer of dried meat from a nearby stand. “What is happening out there that will affect us?”

“Well,” said Masazumi to Mitotsudaira.

She thought about the situation as she formed the words.

“As Heidi mentioned, Houjou Ujiteru lost to Honjou Shigenaga. That one’s pretty painful since we want a victory over Houjou.”

Even if Houjou Ujiteru would rejoin the battle, he had to wait an hour.

Ujinao and Kotarou were still inside Odawara Castle and they could not track down Katou Yoshiaki. But...

“Rumor has it that Houjou Ujikuni aka Genan is fighting in the city, or at least preparing to.”

*I wonder who his opponent is.*

“Waaaait!”

*Ookubo sure is full of energy today,* she thought while closing the sign frame that popped up.

But if none of the Musashi fighters could battle Ujikuni or Ujiteru right away...

“Are there any groups other than Houjou it would be beneficial to defeat?” asked Mitotsudaira.

“Mouri. ...Because we have to face them at Sekigahara.”

Mitotsudaira smiled a little at that. Adele reacted the same way, so...

“What’s so funny?”

“The way you immediately responded to that. You’ve given this a lot of thought, haven’t you?”

“Yes, I suppose so.” Masazumi nodded. “But our fighter against Mouri is, um...”

“Judge.” Heidi nodded. “It’s Hassan. What about it?”

“Well...will he be okay?”

Masazumi tilted her head while opening a map of Odawara.

There was a blue dot to the northeast and it was labeled with Hassan’s name. The red dot facing it had Mouri’s emblem over it.

“He’s up against the Reine des Garous. What is he even supposed to do?”

She opened a divine transmission and had Asama share the transmission to Hassan with Class Plum and other related people.

“Now, what are they doing there?”

The Reine des Garous placed a hand on her chin.

One of her daughter’s classmates stood in front of her.

He was Indian. He had the yoga look and, if the stories were to be believed, that meant he would be able to extend his arms and legs or float in the air.

But he showed no sign of that. In human terms, he was clearly on the weaker end of things.

Unless it was to teach a lesson, a royal prided herself in not crushing the weak. That might change if he had brought a weapon with him, but...

*...What is with this?*

She had a reason to fight, but she could not give herself approval. So she tried asking a question.

“Now, how exactly do you propose fighting against me?”



“Judge. I am a messenger of god.”

“My, so will you be hunting nonhumans?”

“Oh.” He shook his head. “My god is not dangerous.”

“My, a pacifist!? Is this an Indian god, like your appearance would suggest?”

“I am Shinto.”

*Oh*, realized the Reine des Garous.

She had researched Shinto due to where her daughter attended school.

“Shinto. ...How nice. From the very beginning, they have two innocent people join together, drive the heavenly spear into something white, and churn it. Not many parts of the world have such pornographic legends.”

“Oh, that interpretation is not quite right.”

“How so?”

“Judge. ...That story references a certain action.”

“And not a sexual one?”

“Correct.”

This was a new theory. If the previous theory was just a personal interpretation, then so be it, but if an actual Shinto musician was saying so, then she would have to believe it. So...

“Um, what are you saying the churning legend is about?”

“Judge.” He nodded. “It is about curry.”

The Reine des Garous was shocked.

...*Curry!*?

Was he saying the Shinto creation story was actually about making curry?  
But...

“W-wait just a moment. Um, then, what was the white liquid?”

“That is the steam coming from the curry pot.”

“Then what was thrusting in the heavenly spear?”

“They had no ladles or spatulas, so they used their hunting weapons instead.”

“I see.” The Reine des Garous placed a hand on her cheek. “I should have expected this from my daughter’s classmate. ...You know a lot about Far Eastern legends.”

**Mar-Ga:** “Should we stop just listening and join in?”

**Gold Mar:** “You don’t mean by drawing a doujinshi, do you?”

**Silver Wolf:** “W-wait, there is a lot I want to say to my mother right now!”

The Reine des Garous realized they were getting sidetracked.

She needed to course correct.

“Um, may I ask something else? In the ‘joining together’ I mentioned, the man does the thrusting while the woman lacks the proper equipment. What part of curry does that correspond to?”

“Oh.” Her opponent shrugged. “That is a metaphor for the mixing of curry powder.”

He turned to the side and placed a hand on his chest.

“Oh, honey, there is an opening in my body.”

He was playing the woman’s role. But he held a large container with an opening at the top. He put curry powder inside it. And...

“There is something sticking out from my body, so let us bring those things together.”

He then pulled out a pestle and began mixing the contents of the container.

“Do you understand now?”

“So it is teaching people how to make curry as a joint effort between a man and a woman?”

“Judge. The mixing of curry powder requires the spices to be split and crushed

into a powder, which can be difficult for a woman. So there is an old tradition of the woman mixing both of them together and then the man crushing them.”

However...

“This lesson was forgotten after the introduction of curry roux.”

“And that’s when people started giving the Far Eastern creation story a sexual interpretation?”

“Sigh.” His shoulders fell as he sighed. “Times...change.”

Inside a small Western room, Miriam and Azuma sat side by side on the lower bunk watching a sign frame.

“Ah.”

Miriam slapped her forehead when she realized something about the text scrolling by.

“Azuma, sorry.”

“Eh? For what, Miriam?”

“You know how we’ve been borrowing different books of legends and reading them to this girl ever since you heard Sanyou-sensei’s lesson in the library?”

“Reading!”

“Yes, yes,” said Miriam as she held the translucent girl by her side.

Then she looked to Azuma.

“I lied to her. ...Y’know, that Far Eastern creation story is actually, um, about a man and a woman, uh...”

“What?”

“Uh, well, um, you know.”

“Oh,” said Azuma as he watched her blush. “The curry thing isn’t true.”

“Eh?”

“I mean.” Azuma could not let Miriam feel so ashamed. “I wasn’t taught that

back in the imperial palace. Looking back, my teacher automatons taught it to me as a proper story.”

“A proper story?”

“Yes. I didn’t really get it at the time.”

Yes.

“But it’s about sex.”

Miriam threw a slap from the shoulder and hit Azuma.

It made a surprisingly loud noise.

“Wh-what was that for, Miriam!? What did I do!?”

“You didn’t really do anything, but you put me through a lot of mental anguish! And with like a triple setup!”

“Papa, mama, don’t fight!”

Miriam held the girl as she began to cry and pressed their cheeks together a few times.

“Sorry, sorry. It’s just that papa brought unreasonable shame on mama.”

“Un-ree-sun-uh-bull?”

“It means he’s a pervert.”

“Wait just a second! Wait! There’s been a misunderstanding!”

“Huh?” Miriam and the girl both glared at Azuma. “What is wrong with this heir to the indigenous faith?”

“No, um, let’s try harder to understand other cultures. Okay, Miriam?”

“How?”

“Sex!” suggested the girl.

Miriam froze and then smiled at the girl.

“Y-you mustn’t say that when we’re outside. Not ever.”

“So we have sex while at home?” asked the girl.

Miriam froze again and Azuma sensed an awkward atmosphere.

“Okay, I think I’ll go buy us some drinks...”

“D-don’t you try to escape! Explain this to her!”

“Papa and mama will have sex at home! Yay!”

The girl cheered and Miriam spent three seconds collapsing onto her side on the bed.

“I don’t even care anymore...”

“M-Miriam! You can’t just give up on raising her!”

“Hmm.” Miriam turned just her head toward him. “Tea. Plain. ...That will rekindle my motivation. So take care of it. Also...”

“What?”

“Hmm.” She delayed answering, but she did not avert her gaze. “Calling you the heir of the indigenous faith was going too far. ...You didn’t ask to be born into that position. So I’m sorry. I won’t forgive you for the rest of it, though.”

“Yeah, that sounds like you... Yeah...”

“Silly boy.” Miriam smiled bitterly. “When a girl shows even the slightest weakness, you need to go for more. ...Now get going, papa.”

“Um, may I ask something...?”

The Reine des Garous asked about curry in the afternoon sun.

“I have a question about the Far East’s creation story being about making curry.”

“Judge. What is it?”

“If the creation story is about curry, then who is the god of curry?”

“Judge.” Her opponent nodded deeply. “Izanagi and Izanami are the gods of curry creation, so their descendants are all gods of curry. Because curry is a family food.”

“Even Amaterasu the sun goddess?”

He said even more to answer her follow-up question.

“Listen. Amaterasu is a goddess. Now think back to the heavenly spear story. The Far Eastern ladle is said to have been developed in the 8th century.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Judge. The ladle was developed in order to allow the ill empress to more easily eat the food offered to her as a prayer for her recovery.”

And...

“The empress was a woman, so she and Amaterasu are seen as one and the same.”

The Reine des Garous performed a quick divine network search.

And she found,

**<Far Eastern Ladle: Developed by the Taga Taisha Shrine as a prayer for the empress's recovery. Offered to the empress along with *kowameshi* so she might recover.>** “Ladles had already existed and it was thought the soul resided in the round indentation in the center. What we know as a Far Eastern ladle was a strengthened version of it. Curry mixed by one truly is a medicine. It can even bring an empress back to health.”

“But this says she ate *kowameshi*. They did not have much rice-cooking technology back then, so it would have been steamed, wouldn't it?”

“*Kowameshi* is a dish made with glutinous rice. *Sekihan* is one example. But when you think about it, *kowameshi* is really just rice with cooked meat and vegetables added for flavor.”

Meaning...

“It is dry curry. Normal curry is too greasy for the sick. The Taga Taisha Shrine which offered the ladle is located where Izanagi sat in Far Eastern mythology. He had trouble stirring the pot with the heavenly spear, so they developed a cooking utensil there.”

“Wait just a moment.”

She had a question based on the data she was reviewing.

“The time periods don't match. ...Far Eastern mythology was compiled into



the Kojiki in the year 712.”

**Gold Mar:** “...Ture-yan, you’re starting to pick up his accent.”

**Silver Wolf:** “Don’t worry about it! Just ignore it and keep going!”

“But,” said the Reine des Garous. “That empress reigned from 715 to 723. The Nihon Shoki was compiled in 720, but the Kojiki containing the creation story predates that empress’s reign. The Kojiki is too early to view Amaterasu and that empress as one and the same.”

**Uqui:** “...They’re too early, huh?”<sup>[1]</sup>

**Smoking Girl:** “Don’t just repeat that.”

**Silver Wolf:** “She just pronounced it a little wrong is all!”

**Scarred:** “Um, Master Tenzou? I don’t really understand, but you’re talking about the Kojiki, aren’t you?”

**10ZO:** I don’t really understand either, but you’re safe! Yes, you’re safe!”

**Silver Wolf:** “I feel like that was a third option there...”

**Vice President:** “Anyway, the time periods of different documents is always important to Koji-keep in mind.”

**Me:** “...Who wants to go get some stick gyoza?”

**Almost Everyone:** “...Sounds good.”

**Vice President:** “Wait! You’re just ignoring me now!? And if they have free samples, then I’ll go too!”

The Reine des Garous was hit with a puzzle.

*...This anachronism is only limited to the ladle, but it pokes a hole in the credibility of his theory.*

Her opponent had eloquently provided his argument.

If there was a mistake in his reasoning, it could damage the rest of the argument preceding it.

So she asked a question.

“How could the Kojiki give the Taga land – origin of the Far Eastern ladle – as the land in which Izanagi sat if it was compiled before the ladle was invented?”

She smiled and placed a hand on her cheek before continuing.

“If it turns out you were making it all up, I can always use brute force as a method.”

*Oh, no*, thought Masazumi in front of the stick gyoza stand.

“Futayo!”

“Hm? What is it, Masazumi? ...Do you want one?”

She did, but she wanted to avoid anything garlicky when she was going to have to do a lot of talking. However...

“There’s trouble with Hassan.”

Naito turned around where she and Naruze were waiting for their stick gyoza to be cooked.

“...Trouble to him or caused by him?”

“To him at the moment.”

It had been the other one a bit earlier.

*But this is not good*, thought Masazumi. His argument was clearly nonsense. While she could hardly blame the Reine des Garous for wanting to throw him to the ground after it fell apart, that could kill him.

“Futayo, you were the one that authorized Hassan’s participation. How much can he do?”

“Judge. Looking back at his accomplishments...he repelled Tres España’s Secretary, sank a ghost ship, annihilated the Kaga Millionen Geist once, and

partially destroyed them a second time.”

*...Was he really that incredible...?*

“See?” Asama smiled and nodded. “Shooting down an enemy ship here and there is perfectly normal.”

“You do it an awful lot!!”

After joining everyone in that comment, Masazumi took a breath.

“...So, can Hassan demonstrate his strengths here?”

“Judge. Easily. He already did so earlier.”

“Earlier?”

The idiot nodded at her question.

“Hassan will be fine.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. ...Before, when you couldn’t decide who the last person should be and were talking with the others, we all played rock-paper-scissors. And Hassan beat us all in the very first round.”

“What did you play?”

“We all played paper.”

“All of you are hopeless in more ways than one!!!!”

*...What am I supposed to do about this?*

The Reine des Garous sighed.

It would be disappointing to learn the Far East’s creation was not about curry.

The shift from the world’s most explicitly pornographic creation story to a loving family curry story had seemed nice to her. It would give her an excuse to make curry with her husband while doing those explicit things. *Hooray for Shinto.*

But if the curry was a lie, she would lose her excuse to make curry with her

husband while doing those explicit things. *Boo to Shinto.*

“I will learn the truth. ...How do you explain the Kojiki’s early date?”

“Oh.” He shrugged. “That is simple.”

“Simple?”

“The current world has the Testament. The Testament lets us know about things 100 years in advance.”

So...

“They knew about the future invention of the ladle when they compiled the Kojiki.”

*I see,* the Reine des Garous started to think. But...

“Wait just a moment.”

She had realized something. It was a new and even deeper question.

“Then does the Testament mention that the Far Eastern myth is about curry?”

“The Testament does not mention it.”

“Then isn’t everything you have said only your own interpretation?”

“No, it is not.” The curry boy shook his head. “During the Age of the Gods, I agree the Far Eastern myth was probably meant to depict a sexual act.”

But...

“But don’t you think that alone would be insufficient for the second time around?”

“Then...?”

“Judge.” He nodded. “When you have nothing prepared on the dinner table, when your stomach is so terribly empty, and when you want to gather your family around the table, it is time for curry. So curry corresponds perfectly to the myth. ...Wouldn’t anyone think the same?”

**Gold Mar:** “It...ended...nicely...?”

**Bell:** “Hassan-kun is...incred...ible...”

**Flat Vassal:** “I’ll admit that was incredible, but I feel like he just kind of forced that through. Or, um...”

**Vice President:** “You don’t need to find a nicer way of saying it.”

“Testament. That was lovely. Would that be scored highly in your class?”

The Reine des Garous swore to herself she would make curry and do explicit things with her husband once she got back. For now, she checked her *signe cadre* clock. 10 minutes had passed since their duel began.

She had benefited from this duel and he had taught her a lot. So...

“We will call that a negotiation. And I benefited from this first 15 minutes. ... So how will you challenge me during the next 15 minutes?”

“That is simple.”

He walked over to the house across the road. There was a portable stand in front of it. It was a boxy arch that was carried on the shoulders.

The table in the middle had ingredients and dishes stored on either side.

“This is my partner.”

He was ready to go. And his combat style was...

“Can you eat all of the curry I make within the time limit?”

*Huh?* thought Suzu.

She had a question about something she sensed in Hassan’s line.

Everyone around her was hanging their heads. Except for Horizon who was working to consume all of the stick gyoza.

“U-umm?”

Suzu tried asking them.

“Wouldn’t it...normally be...a cooking competition?”

“Suzu-sama.” Horizon turned toward her. “It is quantity over quality, Suzu-sama.”

*Should a Blue Thunder worker really say that? Oh, now I’m sweating awkwardly. But this is probably just due to the summer heat. I need to drink some water later.*

But Horizon did not hold back.

“Quantity over quality. Yes. Adele-sama is happier when we give her a bucket of leftovers than a mere bag of leftovers.”

“N-no! Those are for the dogs! Honest! Chancellor, why are you smiling at me as if to say you understand!?”

Adele was not trusting enough. However, someone else had tensed up.

*...Mitotsudaira...-san?*

“Not good.”

“The left...overs?”

“No, we can leave those to Adele. ...Um, challenging my mother to an eating contest is a bad idea.”

Because...

“She can easily eat enough to drive a newly-opened yakiniku shop out of business!”

*I see, thought the Reine des Garous.*

Challenging the highest-level Loup Garou to an eating contest showed a lot of guts for a human.

*...I should have expected this from one of Nate’s classmates.*

**Former Delinquent:** “Hey, be careful. We have intel saying he’s powerful enough to sink a warship and wipe out an enemy unit.”

**Still Got It:** “I can do both without breaking a sweat.”



She then spoke to her opponent.

“I accept your challenge. ...So will it be curry?”

“Judge. It will be curry.”

He suddenly did a little dance. He wiggled his arms upwards and bent his body.

“C’mon...!”

Just then, the door to the house behind him automatically opened.

There was no one inside. But there was *something* inside.

*...Lots of insulated containers...!*

The house was lined with insulated containers made by cutting short slices of the bamboo used for the bamboo spear launchers. If he could pull pots out of those, he would easily have more than 20.

Curry was made half from the roux and half from the rice, so...

“You come well prepared.” The Reine des Garous nodded and stood in front of the curry stand. “Testament. A standing eating competition? ...That is rustic, but I kind of like it.”

The scent of curry aroused her hunger. And that gave her more than enough of an advantage.

“...Now, bring it on.”

# **Chapter 47: Seeker of Money**

## 第四十七章

### 『金策上の亡者』



全てという字に＼万歳／すると金になる  
金こそ全てだ  
配点（／土下座＼）

Add a *\banzai/* to “everything” and you get “money”<sup>[2]</sup>

*Money is everything*

**Point Allocation(／Prostration\)**

Narumi leisurely spent her time in the city.

She was at a café with an automaton in the kitchen. The tempura she ordered was good, so she tried a number of things with salt while enjoying some sake.

She could hear the sounds of destruction in the distance and the smell of curry reached her nose, so she could tell the others and the various national representatives were having a lively time of it. Since she had already left her nation, she had no intention of proactively doing anything. She would fight back if attacked, but escaping would count as a win to her. Because...

*...Everyone will be worn out after enough time passes.*

Those who had been fighting would be injured and exhausted. Even if she was found, they would be hesitant to pick a fight with someone who was entirely unscathed.

Of course, she had an even bigger reason:

“I doubt anyone would benefit from taking any of Date’s rights.”

Date and Mogami were troublesome figures in this battle. Date was in the north and had few connections to other nations, so no one would benefit much from defeating Date and taking their rights.

Mogami was the same. Since they would decline, there was little reason to defeat them for their rights here.

Of course, Narumi wanted to avoid getting into an unfortunate battle and having those nonexistent rights taken.

*...But looking at it the other way around, we would actually gain more if I went on the offensive.*

The other nations had far better rights than Date.

So she wondered if she should go for it. However...

“————”

She decided against it.

She felt indecisive, but she also enjoyed how her feelings would not stay still.

*...I would always set out immediately whenever something happened at Date.*

From a Date perspective, she should probably do that now too, but she had left them. Masamune had seen her off, so it would be presumptuous of her to claim she acted on Date's behalf.

So her feelings on the matter would not stay still.

“Which is such a luxury. Don't you think...Satomi Student Council President?”

Yoshiyasu had collapsed.

To describe her state, her head was down on the counter. To describe her situation, the sake had done her in.

Yes, she had never been able to hold her liquor.

Drinking with the Date Vice Chancellor in order to speak with her had been a mistake.

The other girl's drink was fairly strong, but it went down easily. So...

*...Oh, this isn't so bad.*

*I've really grown up,* she thought shortly before she found her vision had inexplicably turned on its side.

And there was something below her right cheek and arm extended to the right.

*...A wall!?*

No. It was simply the counter. She had immediately gotten drunk enough to take out her sense of balance. But the counter was well polished. The Houjou automatons were hard workers. The automaton from a certain other café was also a hard worker, but her solution to stains on the table was to pull out a hand plane.

“Are you awake, Satomi Student Council President?”

She said she was. Except when the words left her mouth...

“Ohh...”

“That’s a no then.”

*Oh, no! This isn’t good. The sake is taking over my brain. I could speak human language just a moment before, but now I’m no better than Class 3-Plum.*

*...I can’t believe this...*

She realized she had not had any alcohol since arriving on the Musashi.

It had not seemed like the time for drinking after Satomi went boom.

Also, she did not have the money to drink regularly. She had not forgotten how humiliating it was to borrow basic living expenses after paying the collateral on parts for Righteousness. *Remember this, Hashiba. The Asama Shrine was kind enough to give me a god of war collateral contract where I only have to pay back 1% per month, but my grudge would be 10 times stronger if I’d signed the Treasurer’s contract which required 10% per month.*

“What are you muttering about? Are you okay?”

“I’m fine...”

She had sort of gotten the words out this time. But it was still far from intelligible.

What was she supposed to do? If she dueled the Date Vice Chancellor now, she would definitely lose.

*Please don’t challenge me to a duel. Not that you’d listen.*

Narumi stared at the underclassman sitting two seats away.

She pointed at the *tanzaku* menu on the wall to place an order with the automaton. She remembered the locations without having to look at the wall.

“Give me some aralia sprouts, shiso, and sillago. Also some tempura dipping sauce. Can you also add some grated radish?”

The “testament” response already sounded nostalgic.

*...I’ve really gotten used to Musashi.*

Her drunk underclassman had to be the same.

She knew why that underclassman was here: she wanted to know what Narumi thought.

They were both originally from clans outside Musashi. But during the previous three-nations meeting, the Satomi Student Council President had worked to persuade another nation on Musashi’s behalf while Narumi had been one of the ones needing persuading.

Satomi was a small nation. It was easily manipulated by the circumstances of other nations. That made her more sensitive to the interplay between nations than the Musashi students were.

That would be why she wanted to know what Narumi’s stance as Date was. She was acting as Satomi who were friendly with Matsudaira and as Mogami. And even if that had led to a duel with Narumi...

*...She was prepared to do it.*

Narumi liked that resolve.

The Satomi Student Council President did not often speak or act as a part of Musashi.

So if she had come here to check on Narumi’s uncertain position, was she doing so as a foreigner hitching a ride on the Musashi or as a member of Musashi?

She probably did not know herself. However...

“You need to have a better grasp of your limits with alcohol. Besides...”

Narumi stood up.

“You also need to pay more attention to your surroundings before passing out.”

She got down from the seat and turned toward the café while her summer uniform’s skirt swayed.



“Most of the other nations would have trouble benefiting much from picking a fight with Date or Mogami. ...At most, it would be Sviet Rus. Or so you would think. But there is one force that would definitely benefit from it.”

Narumi turned her eyes toward the seat at the end of the table.

“Musashi Treasurer Shirojiro Bertoni. If you could pick a fight with Date or Mogami and take away one of our rights, I imagine you would go for the right to the trade route we settled on yesterday.”

She had not spoken much with this member of their class, but this was perfect.

The drunk Satomi Student Council President and Mogami Representative would have a slightly rude awakening if he picked a fight with her here, so Narumi decided to confirm whether he intended to fight.

“Were you eating soba?”

“Water is plenty.” He stood up. “Because I cannot waste money.”

“Huh? Musashi’s last fighter was Shirojiro-dono?”

Masazumi nodded at Crossunite’s question.

“Judge. ...When I got home yesterday, there was a prostration at the front door.”

Someone shouted “she’s treating him like an object!”, but treating him like a person would only go to his head, so she had no real choice.

Nevertheless, she had decided to ask him why he was there.

“When I asked him what he was doing, he asked that I let him join in the duels. I was honestly impressed that even our Treasurer could come back to his senses when Musashi needs it.”

“I assume there is a ‘but’ coming?”

“Judge.” Masazumi nodded. “But... Hey, Heidi.”

She saw Heidi trying to tiptoe away.

“Hey.”

“Wh-what!? What is it!? What did I do!? Ohh, I get it. You’re jealous of my good looks, aren’t you?”

“...Asama, what kinds of divine punishments can you dish out without making any charges?”

“Hmm... Those two worship an Inari god, so it would be difficult to do anything directly without any charges...”

“Yay! Long live the Inari gods! Not even Asama-chi can directly blow us up with a divine punishment!”

“Yes, which is why I’ll have to do it indirectly.”

Asama flipped through a sign frame with Hanami.

“Let’s see. I want to reach an Inari god via Asama without any charges... Yes, this questioning one should work. If you disobey, three rolls of ether Inari sushi are shoved up your butt, your skin becomes oily, you pee fried tofu sauce for a week, and you are unable to lie during the questioning.”

“Wouldn’t that last one be enough?” asked Mitotsudaira.

“Well, the Inari gods have always been cruel...”

“Makes sense,” everyone said while Masazumi looked to Heidi.

“When I tried to ask about it last night, he gave me a box of sweets and fled, but what have you two done?”

“Did you eat the sweets!?”

“Yes, I turned them in to the guards.”

“How is that a ‘yes’, Masazumi!? Let’s calm down and think about what you did! There was money in there! 3000 yen!”

“That is an oddly realistic bribe amount given we’re in high school.”

“Dammit!” shouted Heidi as she threw her receipts-and-payments sign frame to the ground. And with a smile...

“Hey, Masazumi? Are you familiar with the issues surrounding Musashi’s

vegetable supply?”

She was not. Fortunately, Ohiroshiki explained without even turning away from watching some local children enjoying the festival.

“If I remember correctly, ever since we left England, most of the transport routes have been filled with materials for repairing and remodeling the Musashi, so the supply has been fairly low. It wasn’t to the point of skyrocketing prices, but some products had a 50% increase.”

“Right!? Right!? So Shiro-kun and I bought up all the vegetables so we’d have a monopoly!”

“But an agricultural wide block was opened up in the Ariake’s empty space, so we began growing our own vegetables,” explained Ohiroshiki. “Mitotsudaira-kun also made direct trades in lieu of taking land taxes from her territory, so the supply has stabilized more recently.”

Masazumi mostly understood now. Simply put...

“You two are deep in the red, so you want money?”

“D-don’t be silly! The first quarter report isn’t out yet, so we don’t know if we’re in the red! You can’t just insult us like that!” Heidi waved both hands around and then pointed toward the Odawara city. “We win as long as we defeat that Date Representative and take their right to the trade route!”

“Don’t destroy the three-nations meeting we worked so hard to bring together!!”

That was when someone stepped up beside Masazumi. Futayo and Muneshige reacted to their presence at exactly the same time.

“Kanou-dono?”

“Public Morals Committee Head?”

“Oh, hello.”

Asama knew her well enough to give a bow in greeting. Kanou bowed back and then...

“Vice President. Um.”

“Is it about Ookubo?”

“No, she seems to be doing well, so there is nothing to worry about. This is a more important issue.”

Kanou opened a small sign frame in her palm and showed it to Masazumi.

Masazumi viewed the text on the non-illuminated sign frame and inhaled. And then...

“Our Treasurer is embezzling Musashi’s budget!?”

**Hori-ko:** “Now, Heidi-sama, the time for kindness has ended.”

**Me:** “Ohh. That explains why they were helping hand out sweets to the neighbors even though that wouldn’t make them any money.”

**10ZO:** “They were trying to ingratiate themselves to us. ...Although that’s useless if we catch on.”

**Hori-ko:** “I suppose they will be fired soon.”

**Marube-ya:** “No, we’ll pay it back right away! We’ll double it! Easily!”

**Silver Wolf:** “...Tomo, what can you do if we have actual charges?”

**Asama:** “Well. ...First, there’s the standard oily skin, but then Shinto bonds are attached to all four limbs to force them into a prostration stance and as many rolls of ether inari sushi as their age are shoved up their butt. That generally makes people scream. After that, a man will have a kitsunebi appear on the end of their crotch for ten months and ten days. For three years afterwards, they will randomly pee ether kitsune udon, which generally makes people scream, but it also automatically returns the embezzled money from their assets.”

**Worshiper:** “It always feels like the last one would be enough.”

**Smoking Girl:** “So that’s what Heidi has to look forward to, huh?”

**Silver Wolf:** “I only asked out of curiosity, but that seems like a little much...”

**Hori-ko:** “No kitsune udon comes out of their butt?”

**Mar-Ga:** “What language was that question in?”

**Asama:** “Umm... Oh, it comes from the butt when the embezzlement happened at a corporation. I think that’s the one that would apply to this case.”

**Marube-ya:** “Nooooo! I’m still young, so I don’t want to produce udon like that!”

**Scarred:** “Master Tenzou. ...Does that happen when you get older in the Far East?”

**10ZO:** “That is the fate of criminals, so you have nothing to worry about, Mary-dono.”

**Tachibana Husband:** “Doesn’t this mean the Treasurer needs to win? I do not envy him.”

**Uqui:** “Yes, Narumi is not going to hold back...”

Below the cloudy sky, Narumi waited until the Musashi Treasurer stood up while viewing a sign frame.

He spoke to her in the center of the road behind the café.

“Date Narumi. ...Allow me to say one thing.”

“I will attack afterwards.”

“...Have you ever considered the feelings of someone who must produce udon from their body?”

She had waited until he was done, so Narumi made her attack.

The very first attack proved effective.

The mandible sword she had summoned into her hand had definitely caught the Treasurer.

That slash would normally bisect her opponent’s body. The mandible sword was meant for use against Sviet Rus demons or gods of war, so it could easily destroy a human.

But her enemy endured it.

The slash became an impact that only sent the Musashi Treasurer flying.

*...A spell...!*

She knew what he had done.

“You used money as a substitution to gain some other power. ...You’ve used it as an attack before, but you can use it for defense too, can’t you?”

Narumi moved forward.

It was a summer afternoon. The heat felt refreshing at first, but the sweat would eventually become an annoyance.

Date was a northern land and she was not used to the heat. So...

“Date Narumi. ...You lose.”

The Musashi Treasurer stood in the center of the road after receiving her attack.

He was not unscathed as he stood in the sunlight. His summer uniform had been torn by the slash, but below that...

“I am wearing ballistic armor woven from 1000-yen bills. Thus, I am invincible.”

“Are you?” Narumi nodded. “Then I’ll just have to aim for the head.”

**Uqui:** “Excellent... Narumi, I’ve fallen for you all over again.”

**Marube-ya:** “Wahh!! Don’t do that, Shiro-kun! We haven’t taken out an insurance policy for you!”

**Almost Everyone:** “You two never stop, do you!?”

Narumi summoned a mandible sword into each hand. She instantly checked on her grip.

She was not going to let him catch his breath.

And he spoke to her.

“Date Narumi. ...You lose.”

That was the same line as before, but he had more to back it up this time.

“Because this is the hottest part of the day. That cannot be easy for someone raised in a snowy nation.”

“...Judge. It’s true this is not the best time for me.”

Narumi summoned Unturning Centipede which was being fine-tuned.

She instantly joined with it. After Novgorod, she had reduced the time lag when starting up Unturning Centipede. So that a certain stupid someone could not interfere like he had before.

*...So it happens in an instant.*

Once it fit around her, she could adjust the temperature inside the mobile shell for her comfort.

The scent of her camellia shampoo was surprisingly cute and reminded her she was a girl. But...

“Now I won’t be too warm.”

Narumi adjusted her grip on the two mandible swords and moved forward.

**Gold Mar:** “Ahh, Narumin is really into this, isn’t she?”

**Uqui:** “Judge. As I said, she never holds back.”

**Silver Wolf:** “Umm, Masazumi? What happens if Narumi defeats the Treasurer here?”

**Vice President:** “They’ll be producing udon, I guess...”

**Smoking Girl:** “Masazumi... Are you trying not to face reality?”

**CAN:** “If I might interject, I believe it may be necessary to reevaluate a number of things about the trade route with Date. I recommend getting Lady Ookubo’s assistance when you do.”

Ookubo saw a sign frame as a large mechanical phoenix pursued her through



the city of Odawara.

HQ had just contacted her. And it said...

“Hey, this is an emergency message. Ookubo, you’ll probably have a large job waiting for you when you get back, so take care of it. You’re perceptive, so you probably already know, but if that udon gets made, we need to negotiate with Date.”

“What in the world does that mean!?”

Ookubo broke the sign frame with a karate chop and kept running.

“Sounds like she’s up to the task. Kanou, sorry about this.”

After Kanou bowed, Masazumi raised her right hand toward her and took a breath.

*...Looks like we can handle this if Bertoni loses.*

*Who can do it? Can-ou...* She added that joke in her to her mental collection and turned toward Augesvarer.

“Augesvarer, how likely is Bertoni to win?”

“Just so you know, Shiro-kun is really good at throwing money around and striking at his enemy’s weaknesses!”

“He sure plays dirty!!”

After joining everyone in that comment, Masazumi faced Urquiaga.

“Urquiaga, how likely is Narumi to win?”

“...She is even stronger than when she fought me. That is the type of girl she is.”

The half-dragon immediately answered her. Then he sighed and scratched his head.

“She was originally a Vice Chancellor, if you recall. If you are not as compatible with her as I am, you will need quite a bit of wiles, strength, and skill to defeat her.”

Just as he explained that, Augesvarer suddenly looked up.

“It’s started!”

Text danced across the non-broken receipts-and-payments sign frame next to her face.

The score providing Bertoni’s amount of money was rapidly reducing.

“Shiro-kun has started throwing it around!”

Shirojiro moved accurately.

His enemy used a mobile shell which could fly with high-speed mobility. His thrown coin bullets would not cut it here.

“Heidi, borrow some bullet acceleration spells from Takemikazuchi. ...Upgrade the usual 10 yen ones to 500 yen!”

“500 yen isn’t enough for Takemikazuchi ones! The retail price starts at 800 yen!”

“Get a discount by buying them in groups of ten!”

“Judge!”

A purchase of 150 shots had already appeared on his sign frame. The bullets themselves were 10 yen, so firing them all would be an expense of 75,000 and 1,500 yen.

*...That is more than expected.*

Withdrawals from Marube-ya’s safe had been stopped.

But not to prevent him from using too much. Withdrawals had been stopped to prevent investigators from acquiring or confiscating the money if the embezzlement of public funds was discovered.

So the money he had on hand was still only the clean money used for business and for running the Marube-ya. Use too much of that and it was possible the Marube-ya would be unable to function tomorrow.

That would not be good. It would distance him from his happy days of

swimming in money.

He could not waste this. And...

“...I must make back what we lost!”

With that, Shirojiro fell back. Narumi instantly filled the gap between them.

Her mandible swords were clearly targeting his neck.

*...What a dangerous girl!*

With that thought, the sword reached him. She was definitely one tempo faster than him.

*...I suppose she is the Date Vice Chancellor!*

Narumi realized the advance tactile feedback had vanished.

This was not about the actual tactile feedback.

*...What was there has vanished?*

Once a fighter reached a certain level, they could feel some tactile feedback before the attack actually hit.

That did not mean they had precognition. The impacts and habits that had permeated their bodies from so much training and combat would cause them to subconsciously feel “the usual feedback” in advance. That allowed them to more quickly take their next action and to detect the depth of a hit, so it was a standard technique for experts.

But that had vanished.

A change in her vision had caused a change in that predictive feeling.

This was not “the usual feedback”. An odd change had occurred, so her experience had not predicted “the usual”.

So what had happened?

Narumi had seen the enemy fall back.

While doing so, he would have used a swayback motion. That meant bending his back so his opponent’s attack would pass by in front of him. Swaying

forward once more could then lead into an attack, so it was a basic evasive maneuver.

Since the Treasurer had used a swayback, his neck or face should have been bending backward in front of the mandible sword's tip.

But this enemy was different.

She did not see the enemy's face, neck, or chest beyond the blade. She saw only empty space.

*...He disappeared?*

That was not possible.

She could in fact see him. The Treasurer's tall form was curled up below the mandible sword.

He had not chosen to bend backwards as he fell back.

"Don't tell me..."

He had done the exact opposite. He had bent forward to dodge the attack.

He had ducked.

Narumi frowned in her heart.

Bending over to duck required swinging your body forward. That evasive maneuver was used when jumping toward the enemy instead of moving away.

But the Treasurer had used it while falling back.

*...Why would he do that?*

This violated the standard rules Narumi knew.

She briefly thought he might have jumped toward her while ducking, but he really had fallen back.

But that was odd. If he bent forward while falling back, he would be moving his head closer to the enemy despite falling back. He would have wasted most of the distance earned by his backwards movement.

And he would have to make his evasion a lot sooner.

He had used a retreating duck.

It had caught her off guard, but it was very wasteful.

*But, thought Narumi. I didn't sense any waste in his movements.*

This was definitely the product of training. He had spent a long time repeating this action countless times. That was how he had reacted to her attack and successfully dodged it. So...

*...What is this?*

She saw him get up after falling back.

And when she saw him, she realized something: his hands were placed on the front of his thighs.

That meant he had just completed a bow.

He had fallen back while bowing.

"...You use that to leave a business negotiation, don't you?"

*Well done, thought Shirojiro.*

He had not expected her to see through that movement right away. She really was Vice Chancellor class. He could not let his guard down.

That retreating bow was a standard merchant evasive maneuver.

You made a shuffling backwards dash while bowing. It was a technique used to leave a bad business negotiation or to avoid a business card attack from someone you wanted nothing to do with.

There were variations that included waving your right hand side to side to deflect the business card or an evasion reversal where you continued back and shifted into a prostration.

A merchant would use it in combat countless times and learn it through hours upon hours of training.

His body did not waver at all and his stable legs and hips bent his upper body smoothly forward.

As long as the timing was right, it could avoid any attack as long as that attack was from the front.

It was especially effective at slipping below a jab or impact. That was because the enemy's attack itself would provide cover for him.

The one thing it had real trouble with was an attack from the side.

If he bowed his head too far, a single horizontal slash could take out everything from his hips on up.

That was why a merchant required equipment that protected their stomach and the rest of their torso.

But even after all this, he could not let his guard down against an officer.

*...That was my mistake in my duel against Tres España.*

That was why Takakane's attack had hit him. Someone at the Vice Chancellor level could see through this evasive maneuver.

He had to make clever use of its variations. Meaning...

*...Mix in some left and right combinations!*

An impressive wind blew through the city of Odawara.

A merchant was fighting a mobile shell. The former used bowing motions to retreat and dodge to either side. The latter repeatedly sent mandible swords his way.

The merchant used his long strides and momentum to slide down the street, but his movements were dangerous. He bent forward with each acceleration, so the mobile shell's swords nearly hit him. However...

“————”

Those attacks were a lot like handing him a business card or a gift. And there was a reason why he could move left and right while falling back.

“I understand,” said the mobile shell. “When there is a line of petitioners, you can't move straight back after making your greeting.”

“So you saw through that as well. Then...”

While falling back, the merchant swung his hands forward in a scooping motion. The hands held 10-yen coins. The coins flew into the blowing wind, and...

“Go...!”

Lightning suddenly raced down the road and toward the mobile shell.

The power residing in the coins slammed into it.

“Go, Takemikazuchi! Do the work I paid you for!”

500 yen’s worth of lightning scored a direct hit on the metal centipede.

Neshinbara saw white light erupt from the Odawara city.

Everyone was preparing a late lunch on the hill overlooking the water source.

Mats were laid out on the slope and Naomasa and Persona-kun carried over bundles of products from the stands. Neshinbara had been placing them in empty bento boxes, but now he stood up.

“Is that...!?”

“Do you know what it is, Neshinbara-sama?”

“Judge! That was Takemikazuchi’s lightning, one of the strongest powers of Shinto!”

**Four Eyes:** “One of the strongest powers of Shinto...? That’s too many ofs and is it the strongest or isn’t it?”

**Novice:** “Shinto has a lot of things that claim to be the strongest. Like Susanoo’s power, Kusanagi, Totsuka, or Hinokagutsuchi.”

**Mar-Ga:** “So what really is the strongest?”

**Scarred:** “Wouldn’t it be Lady Sakuya who set fire to the delivery room and then gave birth in order to prove her child’s legitimacy?”

**Gold Mar:** “Only hearing that part of it makes it sound entirely nonsensical, or maybe like harassment.”



**Asama:** “That’s our god! Keep that in mind, okay!?”

But that had been an attack at the level of Shinto’s strongest, albeit on a small scale.

No one would escape a close-range blast unscathed.

“Is Date Narumi-kun all right...!?”

Shirojiro fell back another 5 meters with the shockwaves and scorching smoke so nearby.

*...That was a direct hit...!*

He was not just assuming. He had fired directly at her. It had definitely hit.

The air-splitting sound of lightning filled the sky and the wind blew through while carrying the smell of iron. And...

“Shiro-kun! What now!? Should I take 50 of the Takemikazuchi bullets we bought and sell them at a markup on Musashi’s Musao auction!? I can use the money to buy more bullets!”

“No, I still need to ensure my safety.”

He lined up 10-yen coins in his hands. He clenched his fists so the ten 10-yen coins all stood up at once.

He then activated the spell for a further attack straight ahead.

“Go! 5000-yen’s worth...!”

# **Chapter 48: Glutton on the Battlefield**

## 第四十八章

### 『戦場の飽食者』



一体何が  
したいのかしら  
配点 (……死体?)

*What do I want*

*For my diet?*

### **Point Allocation (...Die-et?)**

“Yayyyy!! Their rights are ourssss!”

The Musashi group preparing lunch on the hill slope saw the female merchant gloating.

Heidi put her hands on her hips and laughed toward the Odawara city.

She watched as lightning and white smoke filled one corner of that city.

The rising smoke was filled with the residual rumbling of thunder.

“Not even a Date mobile shell can survive a hit from that!”

“Yes, that is true,” said Urquiaga.

He took the boiled chicken from the large bento box Asama had brought and divided it into smaller storage boxes.

“Even Unturning Centipede would be in trouble if that hit it. But that is only the outside. Narumi is on the inside.”

Shirojiro saw countless shapes and lights in front of him.

The lights came from metal fragments scattering through the air. And the many shapes were...

*...Arms?*

They were metal arms.

The mobile shell arms were longer than a meter and a half and a great number were raised in the air. And they all held shattered mandible swords.

Something stood in the middle without any arms.

“Unturning Centipede...!”

It was unharmed.

The smoke came from the metal fragments burnt by the lightning.

Each time the white smoke danced and fell like summer insects, more of the arms vanished.

Afterwards, the shattered mandible swords fell to the ground with a metallic clang.

After the dozen or so objects fell one after another, the blade fragments drew a curving line around Unturning Centipede.

“...Did you protect yourself with a sword dome?”

“Lightning avoidance is a basic anti-demon technique. ...Did you forget that I used this at Novgorod?”

Hearing that, Shirojiro thought...

*...Oh, no. It isn't that I forgot. I wasn't watching in the first place...*

*I planned to sell that information, but what happened with that? Oh, right. I sold that information for quite a lot. I remember the exact price.*

*...That's it!*

“Heidi! Take all the information we've sold on the Musashi officers and related individuals and package them in two box sets: an attack encyclopedia and a defense encyclopedia! Include some previously unreleased information so the enthusiasts will want to buy them!”

“Great idea, Shiro-kun! That won't even come close to making up for the embezzled money, but it'll give us some spending money!”

*Okay,* thought Shirojiro with a nod at the fattening of his wallet.

At the same moment, a new blade was thrust toward the center of his gut.

*...It pierced through!*

Narumi had used a one-handed jab from below. It was one example of a finishing blow in a close-range mobile shell battle.

Humans made such easy opponents.

With a demon or other nonhuman, she would have to worry about exterior armor, but a human had nothing of the sort. This merchant's torso was covered with ballistic armor made of cash, but she doubted that could fully absorb the impact.

If he was lucky, it would break some bones. If he was unlucky, it would rupture an organ.

A mobile shell's attack rivalled a cannon blast and she had felt the blow land. Her right hand felt the instantaneous sensation of something with a hard outside and a soft inside.

And when the impact was released from the blade...

"...!"

*It pierced through*, she realized just before the target burst.

*He burst!?* thought Narumi in confusion.

The sensation reaching her hand was that of her opponent failing to withstand the impact and bursting like a balloon.

*...No, this is something else...!*

She saw paper and wood scattering before her eyes. As well as a light brown skin, white *mochi*, and adzuki beans. It was...

"...Boxes of sweets!"

Those were crucial items for a merchant. A stack of five had interfered with her attack in an instant. It was a merchant's version of a substitution technique.

Narumi confirmed what was happening, what was in front of her, and what was in her hand. She was left with a single thought.

*...What is with this...?*

It was completely off the rails. No, this was the odd feeling of understanding what it all was, but thinking there was no need to go that far.

Regardless it was obvious what this meant for her.

The enemy had dodged her high-speed one-handed jab. That created an opening.

She knew where the enemy was: below.

The merchant was below her jabbing right arm.

He had bowed.

And he moved in a solemn, slow, and orderly fashion.

He gently moved both hands forward as if offering a business card.

They held a roll of coins.

It contained ten 500-yen coins. At close-range, he was offering a total of...

“5000 yen. ...Please take this in exchange for Date’s defeat!”

“Yesssssssss!!”

Heidi swung her right hand in response to the explosion of white smoke in the Odawara city.

“That cancels out our deeeebt!”

Heidi cheered, jumped up and down on the slope, and turned toward Asama with her eyebrows raised in a smile.

“How about that, Asama-chi!? Are you mad we won’t have udon coming out of our butts!?”

“Why would I be mad about that?”

“Yes,” said Horizon while peeling the crust of some French bread with a knife. “Aren’t you glad you won’t have that coming out in the middle of class, Heidi-sama?”

“When you put it like that, we really dodged a bullet here, didn’t we? Anyway, Horizon, what are you doing?”

“Judge. If I dry out the crust, it makes Adele-sama very happy. Also, without the crust, we can add butter or jam for bread sashimi.”

“Sashimi...?”

Everyone looked skeptical, but Horizon did not care.

She looked to the Odawara city and nodded toward the thinning white smoke.

“Judge. A very obvious result.”

The sign frame in her hand provided that result.

**<Winner: Date Clan (Date Narumi) / Loser: Musashi (Shirojiro Bertoni)>** “So Shirojiro-sama lost.”

“Ehhhhhhh!?”

Heidi held her butt, backed away, and turned toward Asama.

“You’re going to do it, aren’t you!? You’re going to turn me into an udon maker, aren’t you!?”

“Um, please don’t get so worked up, Heidi.”

“More importantly,” said someone else.

It was Masazumi. She sighed and accepted some bread sashimi from Horizon.

She added some jam from the plate and ate it. *Ah*, she thought and nearly commented on the flavor.

“No, not that. ...What are we going to do now? Musashi just lost a duel!”

Narumi saw the merchant’s defeat.

In the center of the road filled with white smoke and shimmering heat, he had stopped moving while collapsed forward.

*...A prostration?*

That was what his forward-bent position looked like. However...

“Your legs are somewhat out of place. ...So I don’t need to take it into consideration.”

She shifted Unturning Centipede from acceleration mode to normal mode. After checking to make sure her victory had been announced, she took a breath.



*...Good.*

The mobile shell was taller than a human, so it was dangerous to let someone get too close.

But for a normal opponent, that only meant back-stepping or defending. The armor would not allow the average weapon through.

But an officer was different. The Takemikazuchi lightning attack he used was also used in Date training. Neighboring Mogami had a lot of nonhumans and Sviet Rus was ruled by a lightning user.

Knowing how to respond to lightning was crucial.

Not getting hit was the one and only countermeasure. If you were hit, you had to rely on your armor and buffering spells. If the attack made it through those, you could be fried to the core.

An enemy making the attack at point-blank range was the worst case scenario.

And that was what he had done.

She had been careless because of his irregular behavior. However...

“...You saved me.”

She had recently had someone rush in toward her much like that.

*He* had done it.

He had done the same thing to her when they faced each other in Sendai Castle's hall.

As a half-dragon, he had used a thruster pressure attack. He had used every one of his body's thrusters.

Using the great pressure from the thrusters as an attack was meant for battles against groups or chaotic melees, but he had had the guts to do it at close range and in a one-on-one battle.

If it was countered, the user would lose their acceleration and expose their slowed body to attack.

But he had done it. And she had done it just now.

*...Honestly, what was I fighting against here?*

She turned her back on the collapsed prostration and walked away while sending away Unturning Centipede.

Once the head vanished, she felt the heat radiating from Unturning Centipede's surface.

It was summer and this was a battlefield. But there was something she had to say.

"Kiyonari."

She doubted he could hear her as she spoke with a smile.

"You saved me."

The Musashi group was silent and still as if pinning the mats to the slope.

They sat in a circle with Masazumi's sign frame from Shirojiro in the center.

On Naruze's instructions, Asama amplified the signal (while insisting this was a bad idea and they shouldn't do it) until they heard Narumi's voice.

Eventually, they only heard static from the sign frame, so they all moved away.

After a while, Adele made a seated bow toward Urquiaga.

"Very well done..."

"No, that was just Narumi being tsundere."

But then Heidi collapsed onto her mat.

"Wahhhhhh! Now I'm going to be making udooon!"

"Indeed." Futayo nodded. "So we will have to eat it."

Gin froze in place just before starting on the salad udon she had bought at a stand.

"Hm?" Futayo turned around when Gin glared at her. "Is something the matter, Gin-dono?"

Futayo saw the bowl Gin held and gasped.

“My apologies, Gin-dono. I did not realize you were eating udon.”

She gave a frantic response, so Gin relaxed her shoulders and sighed.

“Well, I don’t really mind. I know you don’t mean any harm, Musashi Vice Chancellor.”

“...I am glad to hear you say that.”

Futayo sighed and checked on the contents of Gin’s bowl.

“Ho ho?” She nodded. “Did you choose salad udon because the tomatoes give it a somewhat Tres Españan flavor?”

“It’s simply a chilled dish, so it has cucumber and egg in it too.”

“I see. But then it shouldn’t be a problem. ...Tomatoes do not come out of anyone’s butt.”

Gin looked into the bowl, paused, and silently pushed it toward Futayo.

“Oh?”

Futayo was puzzled, so Gin pushed the bowl further toward her and then clung to Muneshige.

“Master Muneshige! Master Muneshige! I lost to my own imagination!”

“Oh, dear. That is too bad, Gin. But if something like a tomato came out, it would be best to visit the medical center.”

“What kind of response is that?” everyone muttered while Futayo had already started consuming the udon.

“Gin-dono! The noodle texture and flavor are superb. ...Will Heidi-dono be producing this kind of udon?”

“Stop killing my hope, dammit!!”

Heidi raised her slumped head to shout and then let it fall back down.

Seeing that, Tenzou gave a general assessment while viewing the Odawara city.

“I imagine Shirojiro-dono is willing to accept this since this was a failure met in

the pursuit of money.”

“It really is nothing but money with him,” muttered Toori as he took some bread sashimi from Horizon. He then turned toward Mitotsudaira who sat in front of him. “Nate. ...For now, uh, how’s Hassan doing? Things were getting exciting there too, right?”

“Judge. You are exactly right, my king.”

“It’s exciting?” asked Toori as he passed the wolf a piece of sashimi topped with chicken from the large bento box.

The silver wolf took it and sniffed her nose. She smiled a little when she saw Horizon do the same thing.

“The smell of curry has been wafting in for a while now. Hassan is in top form.”

Mitotsudaira realized the aroma from the battlefield had grown stronger.

*...This curry smells quite strongly of meat. Is it beef curry? No...*

“This is...keema curry, isn’t it?”

Everyone turned toward her when she made her analysis. Horizon was arranging a baguette *ikizukuri* on a long plate, but she gasped and turned around.

“Is keema curry what I think it is...Masazumi-sama?”

“Don’t ask me!”

Mitotsudaira and everyone else turned to face Masazumi.

She took a step back, but then she cleared her throat and clenched her right fist.

“Keema curry is...y’know? That curry that doesn’t fit into the general s-keema of curry.”

Hearing that, Mitotsudaira and everyone else exchanged a glance.

Eventually, they all nodded.

“Yes, that may be a good way of putting it.”

“Right?”

“Judge. And?”

She was not sure if she should ask, but she did so anyway.

“Um, Masazumi? And?”

“Huh?” Masazumi and Tsukinowa tilted their heads. “That was it.”

**Hori-ko:** “I-I am sorry, everyone. I am the Vicereine of Musashi, the battle nation that judges gags harshly, but I had a lapse of judgement and tried to produce one artificially.”

**Black Algae:** “Youthful vigor? Vigor?”

**Vice President:** “Who is teaching them these weird terms!?”

**Gold Mar:** “And weren’t we talking about curry?”

**Mar-Ga:** “It’s scary that we still managed to get sidetracked...”

**Azuma:** “So, um, what is keema curry?”

**Silver Wolf:** “Judge. Simply put, it is mincemeat curry. If you put any vegetables in, it would only be onion and garlic, I think.”

**Asama:** “Mito, if it’s almost all meat...does that mean what I think it does?”

**Silver Wolf:** “Judge. ...That’s my mother’s specialty.”

*Such a strong flavor,* thought the Reine des Garous while she worked on her third serving.

“You did an incredible job seasoning this keema curry.”

She could taste more than just the meat. The process of cooking the mincemeat gave it a new flavor. Instead of just relying on the sweetness of the meat, it was cooked until just on the borderline of bitterness. That provided a savory flavor.

When she bit in, that wild flavor arrived through the curry flavor along with the fat of the meat.

*...He really understands how to use the lean and the fat.*

In the Reine des Garous's opinion, the flavor of meat came from the blood and the fat. They were colored red and white respectively.

The red of meat had the nearly bitter flavor of blood.

The white of meat had the strongly sweet flavor of fat.

With just one, its flavor would be too strong. Unless the meat was of very high quality, the lean would be too tough and the fat would be too strong.

So to strike a balance between them, it was important to choose a piece of meat with a good distribution of fat and lean. That was why meat with good marbling throughout was so highly prized.

But there was a way to enjoy all of the lean and fat without having to choose like that: mincemeat.

By mincing the meat to create a good balance of lean meat and fatty meat, the overall balance could be artificially created.

Keema curry allowed that in a curry.

The texture of mincemeat in the mouth came from the hard lean being crushed until it burst and the white fat splitting and bursting. The balance between them could draw attention to them both, but...

*...The roux holds them back.*

The trick was to make it gentle.

The roux held back the mincemeat's texture at first, but its gentleness caused it to eventually fade away in the mouth. And by then, the mincemeat was between your teeth as artificially-created top quality meat.

Then she found the sweetness and texture of the rice.

"Yes..."

By the time she wiped the inside of her cheeks with her tongue, the aroma of having eaten a meat dish was leaving through her nose.

Also...

“May I have some tea?”

“Judge. Of course.”

Cleansing her palate felt nice. Tea leaves were a plant, so they contrasted the meat. Plants were not her favorite as a wolf, but...

“————”

There was a mint leaf floating in the tea.

That made the palate cleanser much more refreshing.

“Such excellent service.”

“Oh.” He smiled. “It is an honor to hear that from the Hexagone Française Vice Chancellor and Reine des Garous.”

He also had a way with words.

But she was not about to hold back.

The Reine des Garous requested an anti-curry weapon.

“Testament. Can I ask for one thing?”

It was...

“You have it, don’t you? I won’t let you say it is against the rules.”

Mitotsudaira had her hands full preventing her stomach from gathering all of her attention.

The aroma continuing to arrive from the Odawara city was far too dangerous.

It was only curry, but the smell hit her hard. Since the keema curry was primarily beef...

“Th-this is not easy...”

Her king was offering her the bacon and ham dishes he had made for her, but she could not touch them now.

Hassan had stopped sending anything by divine transmissions now that he

was busy. His divine transmission sign frame was apparently being used to manage the cooking because the sounds of cooking were incessant.

That was why Mitotsudaira's nose had to tell them what was happening.

She could get a general idea from the waves of different scents and the differences between the sour, bitter, and sweet flavors she smelled there. However...

"This is not good. My mother is picking up speed."

The scent was strongest when the curry was served. That was because the hot, just-made curry was brought out.

But those waves were speeding up.

And at a rate that seemed abnormal to Mitotsudaira.

*...What is her trick?*

She could tell her mother had picked up her pace, but what had caused it?

If it was just a matter of setting her mind to it, she would have done it sooner.

"What has increased my mother's hunger...?"

Just as she said that, she saw something among the classmates eating lunch.

The bento box her king had made contained some fried leftovers. The vegetables from the day before had been lightly fried into tempura before being cooked again in the oven and dunked in oil.

Suzu and Adele were placing some of those on their plates with chopsticks.

Suzu took a chopped root vegetable tempura and added soy sauce.

Adele took a squash tempura and added a Western sauce.

Their colors and scents led Mitotsudaira to a realization.

"Is that it...!?"

The Reine des Garous had found a way to accelerate her pace.

The key was the oil.



Far Eastern curry roux began by mixing spices into a flour and oil paste. Dissolving that in hot water would create a thick curry roux that could be placed on rice.

Since it used oil, it had a stronger aftertaste.

That was why Far Eastern curry's flavor would linger in the mouth, making it seem so rich.

The best way to cut through that richness was a hot beverage that could dissolve the oil.

Black tea was ideal. Not only did the hot water dissolve the oil, but the stronger astringency than green tea would cause the mucus membranes of the mouth and digestive organs to constrict and reset.

But there was a flaw with that method.

That method would not work with the curry she was currently eating.

She could not pour tea on the curry.

So to cleanse her palate, she had to drink tea or something similar.

But the time it took to drink and the volume of the drink in her stomach were enemies of speed eating.

As a result, people needed time to consume Far Eastern curry.

The Reine des Garous thought it was a good system for a luxurious meal.

*...It is perfect for taking your time and chatting as you eat.*

It was primarily oil, so it took time to cool. That was one reason it was the perfect meal for the family dinner table.

But her situation was different. She wanted to reduce that time and eat more quickly.

That said, she felt soaking the curry in tea would be taking things too far.

*...So – in – stead...*

She supplied that segue in her mind.

Would it be possible to throw out tea's traits as a hot beverage and focus only

on the resetting effect of the astringency? In other words...

“I need a seasoning that can cleanse my palate of the curry’s spiciness and greasiness.”

There was a simple answer.

“And I know just the thing.”

She could supply the astringency with a certain seasoning.

“This sauce.”

“...She’s using a sauce!”

Mitotsudaira grabbed the bottle of sauce next to Adele.

They must have understood what she meant because Asama uttered an “ah”, her king let out an “oh”, and Horizon...

“...Could I have a hint? I cannot stand losing to this boy.”

“I appreciate the honesty, but it comes down to the primary ingredient of the sauce.”

“Of the sauce? That would be apples and honey.”

“Horizon, you’re thinking of the Vermont Curry that has been passed down from the Age of the Gods.”

Of course, curry fit the broad definition of a sauce.

The Secretary raised his right hand. He called up a summary document of culinary culture.

“I know what you mean, Mitotsudaira-kun. The European sauces imported to the Far East are made by fermenting several ingredients. Fermented foods date back to ancient times and have their origin in the fish sauces made by fermenting and dissolving fish in salt. You could call them the oldest processed seasoning.”

“Get to the point...” everyone muttered, but the Secretary only pushed his glasses back up his nose.

“Heh. You probably want me to get to the point. Well, that’s exactly what I’m getting to. ...Listen carefully. The necessary ingredient for making these sauces is vinegar. Vinegar and salt help preserve the sauce, so even the ancient people could create a seasoning they could store for extended periods of time without worrying.”

“Judge,” said Mitotsudaira. “The ones in the Far East are imported from Europe, but they have extra vinegar included as a preservative and to sharpen the flavor.”

Adele sniffed the sauce she had poured on her tempura.

“Now that you mention it, it does have a strong vinegar smell.”

“Judge.” Mitotsudaira nodded. “Vinegar goes well with greasy foods. Those sauces work so well with fried foods because the vinegar dissolves the stickiness of the oils and resets your mouth with the astringency.”

And a definite scent had reached her nose.

“My mother has started using that with the curry.”

The Reine des Garous placed a bottle of sauce on the table.

*...I thought it was worth trying, but I just finished 12 plates all at once.*

But that had only been a test. She had not gotten serious yet.

So she decided she had to take this seriously.

The plate was a fairly gentle oval. It was very nearly a circle.

She wanted to just dump the sauce on, but...

*...That would change the flavor too much.*

When curry and this sauce were mixed, the sauce’s flavor lost its edge. So she had to keep it at a level where the sauce would not be mixed in.

But what would she do?

Her opponent must have noticed her concern because he spoke up.

“That will be somewhat difficult with an oval plate.”

“With a square plate, I could just draw a grid pattern...”

*In that case*, she thought.

“Drawing a circle sounds good.”

With that, she tried it.

“A circle of sauce around the outer edge...”

She drew it. The inside of the plate was curved, so the sauce would end up on the shallow portion if she drew the circle near the edge. So she drew it a little more inward, but...

“...There is not enough toward the center. I need to add two concentric circles between the center and the outside...”

She added the extra circles, giving her three circles of sauce nested inside each other. However...

“...I feel like this layout is going to make me dizzy.”

“It looks like round slices.”

That was true. And it did not quite seem good enough to her.

So...

“Then I’ll add a line from left to right. ...Now I can move the spoon side to side and not just in a circle.”

But she noticed something once she had drawn it.

*...Oh, dear.*

“This looks a lot like the Double Border Crest that Nate’s class is searching for.”

That crest was said to make people disappear.

“Drawing this during a duel feels like an ill omen.”

So the Reine des Garous decided to add a diagonal line to negate the pattern. But...

“I need to stop adding lines in the center if I want to eat this. I can negate the outer circle with lines heading inwards and those can draw my spoon’s path

inwards with them.”

She hummed as she drew the small lines. And...

“That should do it.”

She set down the sauce bottle and looked at the diagram she had drawn.

“Wait...”

She had never drawn this before, but it was somehow familiar.

Mitotsudaira echoed her mother’s voice coming in from Hassan’s divine transmission.

“Wait...”

She had followed her mother’s voiced instructions.

Her king had given her a sausage, so she had placed that on a piece of bread sashimi and then drawn the diagram on top with tomato sauce.

Everyone else also tried it by adding soy sauce, mayonnaise, and other sauces to their lunch.

But they all stopped moving.

Kimi tilted her head toward her *chirashizushi* topped with soy sauce.

“Um, Mitotsudaira?”

“...Please don’t say it.”

Mitotsudaira tried to maintain a smile.

“Very well.” Kimi showed off the soy sauce pattern on her *chirashizushi*. “A lewd mark.”

“I told you *not* to say it!”

Asama quickly placed cooked seaweed on Adele and Suzu’s food.

“Here! Have a seaweed eraser! It’s a seaweed eraser! It’s much tastier this way!”

“Asama-sama, it is somewhat criminal that Mitotsudaira-sama drew it in

tomato sauce and added a sausage.”

“It was an accident! A complete accident, Horizon! And, Tomo, instead of holding seaweed in both hands and smiling, how about we talk this out!”

“Um, Master Tenzou, what is this design that looks like the sun...?”

“Th-this is, umm, the completed form of the Double Border Crest! Yes, the completed form! But it is an ill omen, so you should forget you ever saw it, Mary-dono!”

“Masazumi,” said Futayo. “Do you think I did a good job of drawing it with melon sauce? I like the green color.”

“You don’t have to show it to me!”

After hearing the commotion, Mitotsudaira looked at her handiwork.

After some thought, she decided she just had to break the bread. She bit into it to quickly to erase the evidence, but...

“Ah.”

Naruze suddenly stopped sketching her. And when she noticed Mitotsudaira looking her way...

“Feel free to continue. ...Yes, it’s perfectly all right.”

“What are you talking about...!?”

*Nothing good ever comes from my mother’s involvement,* Mitotsudaira sighed to herself.

She focused on her nose.

The sausage and tomato flavors in her mouth were a balance of pork, tomato, and sourness. She also detected a wave of the curry aroma.

*...That was fast!*

The waves were coming even more quickly than before.

“My mother’s curry consumption rate has doubled!”

Horizon showed her a version of the pattern made with salmon sashimi on a large bento box of sushi rice, but it felt a little too real. On the other side, Kimi

was singing Alaska Girl, but she ignored that.

She wanted to know how the duel would turn out. There was less than 9 minutes left now, but her mother was going through the food like crazy.

*...Will Hassan make it?*

Just as she wondered that...

“Well, I’m sure it’ll be fine. Nate Maman can really eat, but Hassan has to be enjoying this.”

Her king’s voice rang through the summer afternoon air.

“This is a battle between his spirit of customer service and her ravenous appetite. ...Let’s wait and see who wins.”

The Reine des Garous ate the curry with the sauce bottle in her left hand and the spoon in her right hand.

She scooped up the roux and rice with the spoon while adding the sauce ahead of it.

This was faster than adding all of the sauce in advance.

But how did that method of eating look?

*...Is it against the rules?*

She was worried, but her opponent was smiling as he continued to cook.

“I do not mind. It is a luxurious food, but you do want a change from time to time.”

He waved his right hand over the table.

Like magic, he set down small bowls of side dishes.

There were pickled leeks, vegetables pickled in soy sauce, vegetables pickled in sake lees, saffron, and more.

“Eating curry with a bit of extra flavor is one way to enjoy it.”

“It isn’t against the rules?”

“No.” He shrugged. “Curry is a family food. And that means it allows for individual tastes. Curry is the god of the dinner table, but Shinto is accepting of all.”

“I see. So that’s the point of the Shinto connection,” said the Reine des Garous. “Shinto is so wonderfully vague...!”

**Asama:** “I feel like I just heard an important truth distorted by some noise.”

**Silver Wolf:** “So you’re willing to call that a truth, are you?”

**Tachibana Wife:** “Since making the shift to Shinto, I’ve noticed that pretty much all of the taboos work on an ‘eh, as long as you make an offering to your god first’ basis... I feel like that has a way of making people lazy...”

**Tachibana Husband:** “Not to worry, Gin. It has increased your cooking repertoire, hasn’t it?”

**10ZO:** “Mary-dono, how has the shift to Shinto been for you?”

**Scarred:** “Judge. I can eat the same things as you, so every day is a learning experience. I ate mostly fish and wheat in England.”

**Almost Everyone:** “...”

**Scarred:** “Should I learn how to make curry, Master Tenzou?”

**Almost Everyone:** “Ohh...?”

**Silver Wolf:** “The duel is still underway, you know!?”

The Reine des Garous lightly shook the sauce bottle while checking on the state of the duel.

Currently, the next plate was ready right when she completed the previous one.

His pace was increasing. He was clearly speeding up his pace of bringing the pots of roux and insulated containers of rice from the house.

He could keep up with her, but probably just barely.



She needed an extra push to win this. That would bring her across the consumption time watershed.

It would ensure her victory. So she did not hold back.

The Queen made a request to her opponent.

“Could I have a bowl...and one egg per plate?”

“Eh? An egg with curry?”

Adele responded to what she heard from the divine transmission.

“Can you really do that? I mean, wouldn’t it dilute the curry flavor?”

“Does it...neutralize the flavor...to make it easier...to eat...?”

Suzu’s question was directed at the 5th Special Duty Officer.

The silver wolf was looking to the Odawara city with her eyebrows somewhat raised.

“A raw egg with curry... It does sound wrong. I can tell it’s meant to soften the spiciness,” she said. “But think about it. If you put a raw egg on the curry, you need to take the time to stir it in. The white wouldn’t mix well with the curry roux.”

“Then would you put just the yolk inside?”

Kimi shot to her feet on the other side.

“What!? Adele, you want me inside you!?<sup>[3]</sup> And just me!? Will my curry suffice? Okay! In your butt, right!? Then stick your butt out this way, Adele!!”

Adele was too afraid to ignore her this time, so she politely declined.

Then the 5th Special Duty Officer breathed a sigh.

“In the Far East, there is a standard way to add a raw egg to curry. You mix it in with the rice to make *tamago kake gohan* curry.”

*...So that’s how you do it!*

That was a blind spot for Adele. And there was another advantage of that method.

“Add the egg to the rice, and the curry won’t lose its flavor. Nor will it soften the spiciness. But it will increase the sweetness of the rice, making the curry flavor even clearer than before. That is effective in the latter part of the duel when she is starting to grow numb to the curry flavor,” explained the silver wolf. “Plus, Loup-Garous have some trouble with hot things, so this will cool the rice. And this will also allow the rice to more easily come apart in the mouth, making it easier to swallow.”

She moved her nose and trembled.

“My mother is making her attack.”

The Reine des Garous accelerated.

The raw egg in the small bowl was not an obstacle for her.

She stuck her spoon between the yolk and white and used her fingers to rotate it. She instantly mixed it more than 40 times to easily create a soft and yellow scramble. That just left pouring it over the rice.

“Hm, hm, hm, hmm...”

She no longer had to *place* the rice on the spoon. She only had to lightly *scoop* up the golden-colored rice like it was mud.

As long as she could pull off that high-speed motion and instantaneous acceleration, the rest was simple. She only had to eat using the same movement control that allowed her to jump into a spring without creating a single ripple.

Then she could simply obey her hunger.

The beef keema curry was fantastic. As a wolf, she found it worth accelerating her consumption.

She used the sauce to adjust the strength of the flavor and reset the changes to her mouth and she used the egg to adjust the rice’s temperature and consistency. The egg had unevenly permeated the rice, so there was a wonderful marble pattern to the sweetness. She would find the calming warmth of white rice and a moment later find the wet softness of the egg with

the curry and beef on top of that.

It was like using multiple blankets to warm up.

They all had different levels of coverage, so she could only describe it as bliss.

*...How wonderful.*

And just as the Reine des Garous thought that, something better arrived. She found an even greater bliss.

While basking in the happiness, something unexpected happened and her emotions trembled. It came from something that arrived on her tongue.

*...Is this...?*

She had created a completed dish with an ever-changing dance of flavor, but the flavor had just been shifted up to an even higher level.

The trick to it was simple.

“Beef...!?”

*There is more meat in the keema curry,* thought the Reine des Garous.

*...Yes, that's what this is!*

But it was not simply meat.

If thin slices or thick chunks had been added, she would have noticed when scooping it up in the spoon. Besides, that meat would only get in the way of the mincemeat. It would ruin the ideal balance delicately created within the curry.

Then what was this thick sensation of meat inside her mouth?

The Reine des Garous tried scooping up the roux. It was a quick slicing motion meant to show her the cross section.

When she lifted the spoon, she saw something in the dark brown fault that gave off white steam.

“Chips of meat...?”

No, that was not it.

Her opponent smiled and spoke while moving his knife.

“I took thin slices of meat and chopped them in a lattice pattern.”

This was not mincemeat. Nor was it thin slices of meat. But it was still small, thin, squares.

“I take lattice-cut meat that is balanced between lean and fat, cook it so it does not burn, and place it around the mincemeat.”

What would happen then? The Reine des Garous knew.

*...It changes the feel of the meat when you bite into it!*

Before, it had been the roux and mincemeat. So past the wet stickiness of the roux, the chunks of mincemeat would provide some resistance.

But that changed when the thin squares were added.

After all, the squares were small, but they were a “surface”.

Before, the mincemeat had felt like chunks between the teeth, but now they were covered by squares of meat.

The squares covered a larger area of the teeth, so you would feel that thin “surface” before the more solid chunks.

Then your teeth would crush the mincemeat while the squares of meat acted as shields.

That was when the more solid resistance and the burst of oils happened.

It was only an illusion, but it provided a similar feeling to eating a thick slab of meat.

“I have not increased the actual amount of meat. But I have cooked the squares of meat and covered them in roux so they can envelop the mincemeat as much as possible.”

“Is this a meat dish...?”

“No, it is curry. ...Because mincemeat and squares of meat only exist due to their connections to curry.”

“Testament. That is true...”

Beyond her joy and excitement, she honestly felt awed by this food.

*...I never knew such a small alteration could bring so much depth and surprise...*

*I need to research this with my husband once we get back,* she decided. And...

“...Let us continue the duel.”

The Reine des Garous said that with a smile and then accelerated.

Mitotsudaira realized the atmosphere had changed.

*...They only have a bit over 5 minutes left.*

The strong wave of curry and meat came to an end.

That meant Hassan’s keema curry would soon be completed.

Her mother was about to end the duel before the time limit arrived.

“Um, my king. At this rate, Hassan is in trouble.”

She turned toward her king and he looked to her.

Next to him, Horizon, Asama, Kimi, and the others focused on her too.

“What is it?” asked her king. “Did your maman draw another lewd mark?”

“She did not! It’s just that Hassan’s keema curry is running out...”

“Yeah, she did well to get this far. But that means it comes down to the next one.”

“The next one?”

*...There’s a second round...!?*

But her mother’s momentum was incredible. Normal curry was not going to stop her. Without real volume and flavor, she might plow right on through it and declare it inadequate.

*...Mother can be particular about flavor...*

She could eat anything and she had broad tastes outside of the things her species as a whole could not stand. But within those tastes, she was a true

“queen” who knew the absolute best possible flavor for it.

Of course, as a Loup-Garou, her cooking tended to focus more on the ingredients, so she had less experience with processing it in clever ways to adjust the flavor. Mitotsudaira’s king had explained what Hassan was doing with his curry, but that had been an attack on her mother’s inexperience with curry.

However, the keema curry that focused on the meat her mother loved so much was running out. So..

“What will he serve now?”

“Judge.” Her king nodded, raised his hands in front of his chest, mimed jiggling breasts, and spoke in an all-out feminine voice.

“Tee hee. That would be the Reine des Garous’s seafood curry.”

Horizon threw a slap his way without even turning to look.

## **Chapter 49: Queen of a Tasteful Place**

## 第四十九章

### 『華麗処の女王』



あらあらまあまあ  
一体どんなサービスですか？  
配点（お気に召すまま）



*Oh, my, my, my*

*What kind of service is this?*

### **Point Allocation (As You Like It)**

The Reine des Garous's seafood curry.

Mitotsudaira immediately responded when she heard that title.

"That is dangerous! It will not work on my mother! She will refuse it!"

She had a reason for saying this. And it was a simple one. There was only one way to look at it: "My mother was raised in the mountains! She does not eat much seafood. She generally prefers meat over fish."

So...

"The Reine des Garous's seafood curry is something that cannot exist! The title alone will turn her off of it!"

At first, everyone responded with silence. But eventually, they exchanged a glance.

"...If you ask me, that is judging the dish too much by its name," said Horizon.

"That's right," said Naruze. "If you ask me, it probably just means a seafood curry made based on your image of the Reine des Garous."

"So what kind of seafood fits your image of Ture-yan?"

"Polar bear, Margot."

Mitotsudaira just about nodded in agreement with the choice, but it was not actually seafood.

"In that case," said Gin. She placed the lewd mark bread Muneshige had given her on top of her own, cut it in half, and returned it. "Can't he just make it 'Reine des Garous Style'?"

"I doubt that will work," said Asama. "If it bears the Reine des Garous name then Mito's mom will see it as a present."

...Ah.

Everyone else tilted their heads, but Horizon nodded.

And she spoke quietly.

“...We are doomed if it does not have polar bear in it.”

“W-wait, isn’t that being a bit harsh?”

But there was one thing they already knew. Namely...

“Now that it’s been announced, there is no taking back that dish name...”

“Then we can only watch and see what happens.”

With that calm comment, Horizon pulled a pot out of the air behind her.

“Would anyone like some roast beef sashimi?”

Mitotsudaira was curious what was happening with the duel, but she was the first to raise her hand.

The duel was ruled by a calm atmosphere.

Silence had fallen.

The Reine des Garous placed a hand on her right cheek with a bowl on the table in front of her.

*...Now, then.*

There was not much time, but she also wanted to make the best use of that time.

“You said this was the Reine des Garous’s seafood curry?”

She asked just to be sure.

“I am almost a complete beginner when it comes to seafood, you know? The mountains and forests are a Loup-Garou’s territory. ...You still want to go with seafood despite that?”

“Judge, I do.”

She answered her opponent’s deep nod with a “testament”.

He seemed to have plenty of resolve and confidence.

Thus, she did not need to hide the possibility of regret in her heart. This was a duel.

“You know what will happen if it is not to my liking, don’t you?”

“Judge. ...If you cannot enjoy it, then the curry has lost.”

“Testament,” agreed the Reine des Garous.

This purity and integrity may have been the charm of the Far East as a Shinto nation.

“Understood.” The Reine des Garous reached for the spoon in the glass and nodded. “If I take issue with this curry, it is a loss for Shinto and its Far Eastern creation story.”

**Flat Vassal:** “Asama-san! Asama-san! Stop aiming your bow toward the Odawara city!”

**Uqui:** “And I’m pretty sure this isn’t really a crisis for Shinto. It is clearly something else entirely.”

**Tonbokiri:** “Either way, I want to hear about this delicious curry.”

The Reine des Garous looked at the bowl her opponent had served her.

It was curry. However, the contents of the large pot-like bowl were quite thin for curry.

But from the looks of it, it was sticky and some ingredients appeared to be submerged below the brown curry surface. In other words...

“Soup curry?”

“Judge, I made it fairly thick.”

*Ridiculous*, she thought.

“Surely you did not do what I think you did.”

“Are you asking if I made watered-down soup curry because I was afraid of running out of curry?”

“Testament. That is always the question with soup curry.”

“Ohh,” he said with a shrug. Then he shook his head and showed her what was behind him.

There was a large pot of curry. It of course should have contained soup curry, but...

*...It doesn't?*

It contained a substance with a deeper color than the curry.

“That is the concentrated curry I made for the soup curry starting last night. I am dissolving that and serving it, so I am not watering down the curry I have now.”

The Reine des Garous knew what this was. On the way to the Blue Thunder the day before, she had seen something similar in the construction zone starting at Musashino's atrium park.

A concentrated stew or soup had been carried in a large pot to feed the workers.

The cooking had been split up between different parts of Musashi and concentrating it allowed for easier delivery in a separated land like the Musashi.

And if he had used that method here...

“This is not watered down. You can experience true soup curry.”

“...Testament.”

The Reine des Garous nodded.

Soup curry meant he was using quantity to attack. However...

*...I have an advantage here too.*

There was no rice.

Soup curry was a type of curry, but it belonged to the internal category of soup. This differed from the dry curries which were rice dishes.

It was possible to have rice as a side dish, but that would be too much effort. So...

“You aren’t going to insist I eat the rice separately, are you? Rice alone does not count as a dish.”

“Judge, I will not do that.”

He had already begun mass-producing the soup curry. That meant he no longer had time for the dry curry.

But she did not have time either.

And that was why she reached for the soup curry bowl.

She directly drank from the bowl. That option was one strength of soup curry.

*...I’ll just chug it!*

She had little experience with seafood, so she decided to finish it off all at once as she resumed the duel. She poured the thin curry into her mouth.

“...!?”

And she came to a stop.

*...Wh-what was that!?*

The Reine des Garous had been told this was seafood curry.

The defining trait of seafood curry was the seafood stock used in the curry.

The seafood ingredients would generally give it a strong salty flavor and it would sometimes taste like blood.

But this was different. She tasted...

“Is this just normal curry? It’s...”

She had a reason she trailed off.

She had a question. And one she could not find an answer to.

She had supposedly just eaten some normal curry. But...

*...Oh?*

She felt a strange flavor lingering on her tongue.

This was normal curry, but she also felt like it was not.

Why was that? It was the lack of evidence for that question that left her speechless.

*Strange*, she thought. But...

*...I need to calm down and not rush this.*

Most likely, this soup curry contained a number of different phenomena.

But the first thing she noticed was what she needed to figure out first.

“This is not normal curry, is it?”

“Also,” she continued.

The flavor in her mouth was odd.

It was curry, but she detected a flavor other than curry on her tongue.

It was a seafood flavor, but it was not too salty and it had the meatiness that she preferred. Also...

*...It is such a soft flavor.*

Seafood would normally be salty. The saltiness would only sharpen the curry's spiciness.

But this was different. She could detect some of the unique saltiness of seafood, but it was not too strong. If anything, it seemed to surround the curry flavor and soften it.

“You dissolved something in the curry, didn't you?”

“Ohh,” said her opponent with a smile. He approached with something in a small bowl. It was like heated clay, but it was actually the concentrated curry from the big pot.

Its viscosity had increased somewhat as he heated it and the Reine des Garous ate a spoonful.

When she crushed it with her tongue, she found a strong flavor.

The taste dissolved in her saliva and returned to its proper form. And...

*...Oh?*

“This is normal curry...”

Curious, she took a bite of the soup curry in her bowl.

It was different.

But how was it different from the contents of the big pot? She compared them once more.

“...Ah.”

She figured it out. There was a definite gentle seafood flavor on her tongue, so how could he have introduced that into the curry?

“You dissolved something into the soup used to dissolve the curry, didn’t you!?”

“Judge.”

He raised the insulated container sitting next to the big pot. It contained the soup stock for the soup curry, but when the Reine des Garous sensed its scent and color...

“...Soba sauce!?”

“Judge. Technically, it is bonito stock *kaeshi*.”

He pulled a few bottles out from his stand. They included soy sauce, mirin, and sake.

“In the Far East, soba shop curry is seen as something special. The curry at soba shops is made with *kaeshi* soba sauce, but that is why it has the gentle flavor of Far Eastern cuisine despite being curry.”

“Then this bonito stock...?”

“Judge. I considered using kombu stock to soften the flavor further, but you live in the world of meat. Bonito stock has a wild flavor, so I thought it would be best to base the curry on that solid fish flavor.”

...*He’s right.*

If she had been given the same conditions, she would have made the same choice. *In that case*, she thought.

“Is this what you are calling the Reine des Garous’s seafood curry?”

“Judge. You are a mother. So if you were attempting to make seafood curry, I figured you would not go straight for the seafood you are unfamiliar with and would instead attempt something simpler and more familiar.”

In other words...

“Bonito stock curry. Instead of a seafood curry made by adding seafood to curry, I thought you would make the entire curry into seafood. And as a mother, I thought you would give the curry this softer flavor.”

“...You think I am this kind of soft and gentle woman?”

“Oh.” He smiled. “Could you scoop out some of the contents?”

*...The contents?*

She was puzzled, but she stuck her spoon in all the same.

At the bottom, she found something with some weight to it.

“Meat...”

It was not mincemeat like with the keema curry. Nor was it chunks of meat or thin slices of meat.

*...It has the bone in...!*

She had found pork ribs. Due to the concentration process, they were in soup curry, but they had been fully dyed the color of curry and even the fat was faintly yellow.

The Reine des Garous noticed something as soon as she decided to eat it. The sensation when she had scooped it up with her spoon had been odd in a few ways.

So she scooped up another piece.

“Is this...?”

It was definitely rib meat. But the color and thickness were different from before.

“That is venison,” explained her opponent. “Venison is cooked by continually heating it at around 80 degrees. That is easily done by parboiling it while making the curry.”



She stuck her spoon in some more and found different types of meat.

Boar. Lamb. The small ones were rabbit. There was also duck. And...

“What is this...?”

It was meat. And it looked like a tongue. One side was cut in a grid pattern and the large body bent back as if to open that up. But even with the curry color dyeing it, she could tell it must have been white to begin with.

It had an odd meaty texture different from fatty meat. She hesitated a moment, but then bit into it.

She placed it in her mouth and bit down. She found a chewiness similar to hard cheese, as well as a sweetness.

She recognized the flavor.

“This is squid, isn’t it...!?”

“Judge. It is the largest seafood meat that you can get in a single piece.”

The grid pattern cut in one side increased the meaty chewiness and made it easier to bite through. The unique smell of squid had been erased by the curry and grease entering through the gaps in that grid.

When she searched along the bottom, she found scallops. They felt good between her teeth and she could tell they had been cooked in butter for flavor. He had done his best to eliminate the seafood smell.

Yes, thought the Reine des Garous. *This is interesting.*

And she belatedly realized something else.

All of the meat inside had bones in it.

With the previous curry, the curry would have stuck too strongly to the bones.

But with soup curry, the curry only formed a thin film over the bones.

When her opponent placed a handwashing bowl and hand towel on the table, she knew what to do.

She could grab the bones with her hands and eat it like a wolf.

“Excellent job.”

With the bowl in her left hand and either a bone or her spoon in her right hand, the Reine des Garous got to work on the soup curry.

The battle had begun once more

The Reine des Garous's seafood curry.

*This was a good idea*, she thought.

It was full of meat, but the stock, squid, and scallops excused the name. If a resident of the mountains and forest were to serve her child seafood as a mother, it would likely take this form.

She thought while eating the meat, drinking the soup, and feeling satisfied.

*...But this is missing something that my cooking would have.*

"Um, excuse me."

"You want this, don't you?"

Her opponent set a plate down on the table.

The large plate contained a small mountain of citrus fruits. They were thumb-sized and had the same traits as oranges despite their small size.

"These are kumquats."

Citrus was an important accent for her cooking.

She was slightly amused to have these presented to her like this. Just how well had he read her? But when she scooped up one of the small fruits and bit into it...

*...Ah.*

The word "refreshing" filled her mouth. It was sour and had the aroma of fruit juice, but most of all, it was sweet.

"I lightly preserved them in sugar."

That explained it.

The flavor went perfectly with the soup curry. The small citrus fruit would have been overpowered by the previous stronger curry. And a larger fruit would

have been too strong.

The sugar-preserved kumquats were the perfect match.

Give one to a child and they were sure to complain about the sourness but enjoy the sweetness.

After eating two or three of them without thinking, the Reine des Garous realized something about herself.

“I need to eat the curry.”

With that, she started back at it. Given his stock, she could catch up if she used her full speed. After all, this was no more than meat and soup. It was far lighter than before and she was in the right mood.

*...I do kind of wish I had some rice.*

Of course, she would run out of time before finishing if she added rice to this.

But she selfishly did want some of that staple.

However, rice did not go with soup curry. It would not work. That realization brought a thought to mind.

*...That is a little disappointing.*

And just as she sighed...

“This is the last dish.”

Her opponent walked over with a long plate.

It contained rice.

But the white grains alone were not enough to serve as a dish.

However, what he placed on the table was different. It was no more than rice, but it was also not being served as a simple staple. It was known as...

“These are rice balls.”

“Honey?”

Mitotsudaira heard her mother’s voice on the divine transmission.

She had called out to Mitotsudaira's father. And she continued from there.

"I had such a wonderful time *thanks to you*."

And...

"I still have time left, but this is my loss."

The Reine des Garous took a breath.

The Musashi curry artisan bowed toward her.

She bowed back and thought to herself.

*...He did a splendid job of defeating me.*

The keema curry and the seafood curry had both been prepared entirely with her in mind.

That meant he had joined the battle solely to defeat her.

It had taken her too long to realize that.

"This plan was thought up by my daughter's king, wasn't it?"

"Judge. I came up with the curry varieties, but he had the original idea."

Then it made sense to her.

She was reminded of the previous night.

Her daughter's king and her own husband had discussed cooking. The king must have used that to learn her tastes and come up with this plan.

She was also impressed by the opponent who had worked out a concrete form for that plan and then prepared the food. He had to have stayed up all night working.

And that was why she understood.

"I am not shameless enough to insist I won after receiving this kind of hospitality. And even though I lost, it was on my husband's instructions."

She could not keep a smile from her lips.

"How many times have I been 'ruined' by his cooking now?"

She could not beat him.

And so she took another breath and reached for the rice balls she had been served.

The white rice was gently pressed together just enough to remain in a perfect triangle.

When she took a bite, a slightly salty flavor and the damp rice steam spread through her mouth.

Her mouth still contained the flavor of the soup curry, the meat, and the citrus fruit, so this tasted properly “white”.

The next thing she knew, she was pushing the last corner into her mouth with a finger and she had finished eating it.

*...This is Far Eastern culture.*

They could make a dish out of mere rice by pressing it together in their hand.

That was unthinkable in a culture of flour and meat. But for something that just barely qualified as “prepared”, it had a simple but deep flavor.

That was especially true after eating something so strong.

This was the staple of Far Eastern foods. She did wonder if it all led back here in the end, but now was not the time for that. There was something else she had to say.

“...That was an excellent battle.”

“No, no. It isn’t over yet.”

“Eh?”

She tilted her head and he pointed at the table and the large pot behind him.

“There is still more left. The fun can continue a while longer.”

“True enough.”

She had an hour of spare time after the duel, so relaxing here sounded nice.

“Do you have any keema curry left?”

“Judge. I have a spare pot of it.”

He was so very reliable. So the Reine des Garous placed a hand on her cheek and knew she had a smile on her face.

“Then let’s go back to that for a while.”

Also...

“Could I get the recipe for that? I want to try cooking it for my husband and Nate.”

“Yes...!”

Masazumi stood up when Mitotsudaira reported on the result.

“That’s one victory over Mouri! It means a lot to have something that counts as ‘victory’ in the Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle.”

*...We can finally start the negotiations...!*

“Honestly,” said Masazumi as she looked across the others. “I’m glad all of you chose paper! All of you losing is the best!”

“Th-that’s not a very nice thing to say!”

But one person stood up from among them: Horizon.

She raised her right hand and took a step toward Masazumi. Masazumi also approached and slapped her palm against Horizon’s right hand.

“Yes...!”

“Well done.”

As soon as the forceful high five hit, Horizon’s right shoulder disconnected and the arm flew off.

It immediately rotated like a throwing axe and flew into a stand across the way. It paid a sudden visit to the person cooking Far Eastern pizza on an iron skillet.

“What...!?”

Then they realized what had flown in.

“It’s an arm...!!”

That began a commotion. The arm tried to flee, but a passerby saw the wrist sticking out when it hid below the stand.

“A dead body...!!”

They screamed and a panic fell over the entire festival ground. After a while, the right arm returned after sneaking through the commotion by hiding in the grass. But according to its owner...

“I made this peaceful festival much more dynamic without even meaning to.”

“Has that connection gotten loose?”

“No, I thought the looser setting would be funnier. And the response was even greater than I expected.”

*I should've known...* thought Masazumi while hanging her head, but then the idiot walked up.

He raised his right hand.

“Okay, Seijun. Let's try that again.”

“Judge. I'm not sure what that will accomplish, but fine.”

When they shouted “yes” and brought their hands together, the idiot twisted his arm around.

“A true celebration demands a rotating high five!”

That was probably the mistake. Because Masazumi swung her arm forcefully around in an attempt to match the strange movement. And...

“Ah.”

When her hand hit, a light popping sound came from the idiot's right shoulder.

“Eh?”

Everyone looked to him. And Mitotsudaira...

“M-my king! Did you just dislocate your right shoulder!?”

“Eh?”

The idiot looked at his right arm and saw the shoulder was sticking out to the

side oddly.

He tried to move the arm, but only the forearm would move.

“Oh?”

“Foolish brother! An opportunity like this doesn’t come every day! It’s time to prove your worth as an entertainer with some adlibbing! Now go!”

“Ohh, sis! Just leave it to me! ...Okay, everyone, face this way.”

Masazumi looked away, but the dislocated idiot took a bowlegged stance and ran toward someone who had the bad luck of turning toward him. The dislocated crossdresser grabbed his limp right arm with his left hand and waved it back and forth.

“Ohhhhhhhhh! Adele! Look, look, look! It’s a big meat stick. With bone inside.”

“Waaaaahhh! Don’t show me that gross thing! Stay away!”

“Don’t call it gross! It’s just a crossdresser waving his meat stick around so you can high five it!”

*What kind of situation is that supposed to be?* wondered Masazumi despite somewhat being the culprit here, but Asama soon stood up. She placed her hands on Horizon’s shoulders from behind to tell her to calm down.

“Okay, Toori-kun, come over here instead of creeping out Suzu-san. Umm, Masa? Please pop Toori-kun’s shoulder back into place. You can do that, right?”

“Hey, Toori, over here.”

“Sure thing!” said the idiot as he approached Naomasa who immediately grabbed his arm.

“Owwwwww!”

He screamed and Asama began healing him.

*...But, well...*

Masazumi watched the series of events and the current situation.

Asama sat next to Horizon and the Aoi Sister and she placed the idiot’s head



in her lap. She pasted a charm on the crossdresser's shoulder and began the healing while Mitotsudaira slowly approached in the usual way. However...

*...The idiot is taking it easy.*

So was Asama. At Sanada, the idiot had been hesitant to receive healing and Asama had insisted on taking things more seriously. But now the idiot was entrusting himself to her and Asama was naturally accepting it.

Although it was a bit worrying how Horizon was messing with the idiot's fingers and trying to tie them in a weird knot.

"I see."

"...You see what?"

"Nothing really," was all Masazumi said at first.

She did not know what had happened at the Aoi home last night. Nor did she know what had happened in the study camp tent before that. But even though that group had known each other for a long time...

"Relationships can change, can't they?"

Asama must have heard her because her expression changed.

In the past, she probably would have been visibly flustered and even panicked, but now...

"Well, you know... Mito's mom talked a lot about presents..."

Her cheeks lightly flushed and she smiled bitterly.

Masazumi had a thought about that expression.

*...Will I ever have that kind of look on my face?*

She wondered who it would be with, but that would all come with time. Although there were some people like Sanyou-sensei who it had not come for. And their homeroom teacher did not count since she did not seem interested in that sort of thing. However...

*...I've changed too.*

A year before, she had never imagined she would be thinking about this sort

of thing. Her only vision of the future had been whether or not she would take her first step as a politician.

And...

“Masazumi.”

Futayo raised her hand from where she stood next to Masazumi.

“Futayo?”

“Would you like to do it with me once?”

“If I do it too strong, I’d probably dislocate my own shoulder this time.”

She lightly swung her arm, and...

...*Oh.*

A nice sound came from Futayo’s hand. Futayo had barely swung her hand. She had only caught Masazumi’s.

Masazumi felt the need to say “judge” because of how nice it felt. And...

“Was that good enough, Masazumi?”

“Eh? ...Yes, I’m satisfied.”

“Excellent. I too am satisfied that we could have sex.”

*Hold on.*

She looked around in search of assistance, but everyone was already facing the other way. Mary tilted her head as if she thought she had misheard Futayo, but that was Crossunite’s problem. *Will they continue eating lunch together to avoid the issue? I see. The Tachibana Couple haven’t reacted at all. They sure are tough.*

But Futayo smiled and spoke to her more.

“Masazumi, I must treat you right as you may become my wife.”

“Wait just a second...!”

“Hm? Do not worry. I have not earned my inherited name yet, so it is still too soon for marriage. So we will remain friends for now. In other words...”

Futayo placed a hand on her chin and nodded like she had had a good idea.

“We are sex friends.”

Three seconds passed. Then Naito noticed something.

“Ga-chan, your nosebleed is dripping on the Magie Figur.”

*Can she make a new doujinshi out of this? Wonderful. Simply wonderful...*

*...What do I do about this?*

The person who had started all this back in England was bleeding and Masazumi had taken damage.

She looked over and saw the Aoi Sister teasing Asama and Mitotsudaira.

“Heh heh heh. You two are sex friends too! Isn’t that right!?”

They glared back at her and the idiot was laughing.

*I see, thought Masazumi. A year ago, she could not have imagined anything about herself now, including this stuff with Futayo, so even if she could not imagine it now, that sort of thing and other things were possibilities for the future. So...*

“Well, we’ll see, okay?”

She could not deny the exasperation in her voice, but there was no helping that. She saw Kanou walking over again. When the automaton arrived, she bowed.

“Excuse me.”

“What is it, Kanou? A further report on the Treasurer’s embezzlement?”

“Judge. I received word of a corpse being found in the festival, so I am on a patrol. And I have a report from Lady Ookubo.”

Which was...

“She has engaged in battle with one of the Houjou representatives: Houjou Ujikuni, aka Genan.”

Ookubo was being chased.

She was running.

She had clearly been running too much. She had been doing it at full speed for more than half an hour.

But she had to do it. Because behind her...

“Hey, are you about ready to give up yet?”

A mechanical phoenix was chasing her.

It moved a lot like a chicken.

It had thundering footsteps and it sometimes thrust the point of its bow out to attack. She could tell it was toying with her, but the frequency of those occasional attacks was increasing. And...

“Click.”

The cannons at the base of the closed wings fired bullets of light.

She was focused on dodging. Luckily, the enemy projectiles could not gather very close together from the left and right, so she worked to stay between them. And...

“...!”

Ookubo swung her body and let the bullets pass her by.

Then she resumed dashing.

And she thought about how there had been an oversight in the duel rules.

*...The duel never begins if you keep running away!!*

The duel could not begin if they did not begin the duel. It was a simple definition, but it had tripped her up a fair bit. After all, she could run away from an unwanted opponent for more than 30 minutes, but she would not be spared.

If she was to escape, she had to begin the duel.

The rules had clearly been created by a belligerent group who were only interested in fighting. Farewell, liberal arts. Everyone was only interested in the

fighting.

But if she did begin the duel, she could not win. So...

“Ah.”

She belatedly realized something.

*...Couldn't I have started the duel and then run away for 30 minutes?*

If they could not end the duel, it would probably be counted as a draw. That was a big discovery. It was definitely a loophole in the rules.

“Ha ha.”

*...I didn't expect such a simple loophole.*

“Ah ha ha ha ha.”

She laughed as she ran.

*...But it's too late to do that now!*

She was about to run out of energy. She could smell curry from somewhere, but who was eating that? Had they brought it here?

*...I'm so hungry.*

“————”

*Oh, no*, thought Ookubo. Once she noticed her hunger, it came rushing in at her. An odd sleepiness filled her. This was what they called hitting the wall.

*Not good, not good*, she scolded herself as her mind was dragged down.

*...If only I wasn't so smart...*

She knew exactly what happened to people when they hit the wall.

Their vision narrowed and weakened, their body trembled, they perspired, and their body temperature dropped. As all that hit them at once, their knees would give out, and...

“...!”

Ookubo came back to her senses at the last second.

*...Are you stupid!?*

*That* was not happening to her now.

So if *those* effects were happening, it was no more than mimicry.

She was restricting herself and giving up in accordance with her knowledge.

How stupid.

She could not let herself mimic her knowledge. If she did that, she could never leave her own boundaries.

She had already experienced what it meant to think only with her own standards and subsequently fail to reach her goals.

It had happened at the special student general assembly before the battle at Novgorod.

She had meant it as an admonition and her side's justification had been for show, but she had been shown something even greater than that.

She should have pushed at her opponent and resolved the issue with her own power, but they had given a better answer.

That negotiation and debate was a bond within her.

She had two inherited names and people had long had high hopes for her, but she had been surpassed by someone with neither of those things. That was reality and it was "outside".

"Honestly."

She had corrected herself then, but here she was returning to her former self.

That was the problem with being smart.

It was not time to end this yet. Surely not yet.

*...That's right.*

Her mind rose back up. Her vision widened. She had simply been sweating and highly focused. The weakening in the knees was only her exhaustion.

If you ran, you would get tired. That was an obvious fact. So...

"...Next!"

Ookubo approached a turn. It was a 90-degree curve to the left.

This was a good spot. The enemy's pursuit would slow at the sudden corner. If they moved too fast, they would crash into the building. So she had to increase her speed here.

*...Okay!*

She ran around the corner. The scenery seemed to rotate around her and her sweat flew into the air to her right.

A moment later, an impact hit her body.

She had been hit by an attack from what she could only call an ambush.

Kanou opened a sign frame while watching Class Plum eating dessert.

*...Milady.*

"What is it, Kanou? Or should I call you Public Morals Committee Head?"

"For now, Kanou is fine. More importantly, Vice President, about Lady Ookubo..."

Kanou tilted her head and opened her mouth. The dot on the sign frame indicating Ookubo's position had stopped moving.

"I have determined that she has been captured by the enemy, built her resolve, or run into some other situation."

Ookubo's vision grew distorted.

She rolled a few times before stopping on her back.

*...Oh, no.*

Her legs were trembling and she could not move them.

Her arms were bent at the elbow and seemingly stuck like that.

No, she could still move her left arm. Its autonomous functions must have kicked in because it was supporting her heaven-facing body.

Her sweating had gotten a lot worse. Stopping so suddenly had been a bad move. The sweat poured out as if pushed out by the pounding of her heart which was no longer so heavily burdened.

Her summer uniform's inner suit allowed moisture through, so the sweat beaded up on her tights and suit before tickling her as it dripped to the ground.

But even with tears and sweat distorting her vision, she could see beyond her heavy breathing.

Someone stood there in a combat pose.

They were small, they were no taller than Ookubo, and they wore a brimmed hat.

"Satomi Student Council President...!?"

"Did I surprise you? But it looks like I arrived in time."

Yoshiyasu did not glance down at the Representative Council Head who lay on the ground.

She had sobered up. She needed to look dead ahead where the Houjou mechanical phoenix had stopped in front of the corner.

She also saw a column in the corner of her vision.

It supported the eaves of a house on the corner.

It was positioned like a pillow for the collapsed Representative Council Head.

There was a hole in it.

It was a bullet hole.

*...That was a close one.*

She was glad she had been able to circle in front of the Representative Council Head. That girl was quick on her feet, so getting ahead of her had not been easy. The hangover as she had started to run had not helped matters.

That meant someone else was targeting that girl. Yoshiyasu had noticed and knocked her out of the way, which led to the current situation. However...



“...”

There was no sign of the person who had targeted the Representative Council Head.

Had they distanced themselves from here, or had they gone to a different battle?

*...Either way, she's safe.*

So Yoshiyasu lightly lowered her hips while facing the mechanical phoenix.

She reached out a hand toward the Representative Council Head and the girl's prosthetic left arm reached back.

She grabbed it and pulled her up.

*...It isn't going to pop off like with Musashi's princess, is it?*

Was that strange concern a sign that she was being contaminated too? In that case...

“I cannot afford to lose if I don't want them to laugh at me. ...Genan.”

Once the Representative Council Head stood up on wobbly legs, Yoshiyasu pushed her below the eaves and then tilted her head.

“It's been a while since I fought against Houjou, so I'm going to enjoy this.”

“Ho ho? You only ever followed after Yoshiyori-kun or charged recklessly ahead, so what could you possibly show me?”

“What I will show you should be obvious.”

With that, Yoshiyasu crossed her arms. And in that instant...

“Come! ...Righteousness!”

Ookubo saw it from her position below the house's eaves.

It was a god of war.

Satomi Student Council President Yoshiyasu's Righteousness landed behind her.

After a brief rumbling, the wind arrived.

Her sweat was blown away and she felt like her exhaustion was taken with it.

“Mogami Representative Satomi Yoshiyasu! I begin this battle with righteousness!”

The girl’s loud voice announced the beginning of the battle.

# Chapter 50: Two Skilled Ones in the City

## 第五十章

### 『市街の二達者』

届くのか  
届くだろう、  
届かせるんだ  
配点（伝達）



*Will it reach?*

*Of course it will*

*I'll make sure it does*

### **Point Allocation (Message)**

“Oh.”

Naomasa was the first to speak up.

She had reacted upon seeing Righteousness stand up from the southwest side of the Odawara city.

Two sign frames were opened next to her. One displayed Mishina Hiro who was on the way back from Suwa and had the transport ship sky in the background.

“Masa, is Yoshy’s Righteousness moving?”

“Judge. From the look of things, it’ll manage.”

“I see. ...That’s good. That was my first big job here, so I was a little worried.”

“If you were worried, you still need more experience.”

Naomasa then looked to the sky visible behind Hiro. Based on the information from the engine division and the optical observations from Musashi...

*...It’s going to take another 4 or 5 hours before they arrive.*

What would happen with Noriki?

As part of the engine division, she was honestly more interested in how her classmate had “redone” his spell. She was a mechanic, but she still lacked knowledge and experience when it came to spells. She had modified Naito and Naruze’s *schale besens* in the past, but that had only made her painfully aware of her inexperience and it had only excited her.

But regardless...

“Okay, Masa! You take care of things there! I have some work to do below deck.”

“Being the team leader is a lot of work, isn’t it?”

“It’s not so bad,” said Hiro before ending the divine transmission. But the sign frame did not disappear. The transport ship was still sending her information.

And Naomasa looked to the other sign frame.

That one displayed Taizou who was looking at another sign frame.

“...Hey, Old Man Taizou.”

“Judge. I was listening in.” Taizou placed a hand on his chin. “Hiro has finally gotten used to how we do things and she’s focused on making a name for herself. That’s why she has that tomboyish way of speaking. She started out speaking in a completely masculine way, but my stupid son-in-law told her to tone it down some and only be a little masculine. He claimed that ‘tomboyishness’ made him happy.”

“Did you punish him for that one?”

“I had him produce some extra armor panels for the Ariake. Thanks to that, we should have enough for the front surface this time.”

“And it’s all thanks to Hiro, huh? ...Anyway, she probably thought she had to ‘change’ because of how small she is.”

Because...

“The mess with Sanada’s Isa was tough on her so soon after arriving on the Musashi.”

“That is not a fun topic to talk about.” Taizou smiled bitterly. “And if something isn’t fun, you just have to laugh it off and tough it out. And when it is fun, what can you do but laugh? This is a good chance for her to learn both those things. ...When she realizes how worked up she is right now, she’ll have finally grown accustomed to Musashi.”

“I feel like you’ve been raising her *too* well.”

“Most of the raising has been done by my daughter, so I can hardly say she was raised poorly.”

“Is that so?” said Naomasa with a nod.

Just then, the crossdresser raised his head with a bandage around his shoulder.

“Naomasa, Flatty’s god of war is moving, right? But she isn’t riding it, is she? Then how can it move?”

“It has an autonomous mode, so it can move based on what it’s learned.” Naomasa raised her prosthetic arm. “But now Righteousness has the same automaton support system as Jizuri Suzaku. ...Transfer Ceremony is a heavy god of war external comprehension and response system. The god of war will move itself in sync with Yoshiyasu’s movements.”

Yoshiyasu heard mechanical movement rumbling overhead.

It was the familiar sound of Righteousness moving. But it was unusual to hear it overhead while in a city. This was very nearly a first for Yoshiyasu.

And...

*...Those are my movements.*

Righteousness’s sight devices were watching her actions. Those sight devices were in more than just the head. They were also installed across the body, providing a wide-range field of vision.

*...That way it can see me when I’m down by its feet.*

This was not a problem. Her biggest fear had been being stepped on from behind, but...

“———”

When she started walking toward Genan’s mechanical phoenix, a slight wind moved behind her.

Righteousness was walking after her.

*...Ohh.*

And its right leg moved by on her right.

But the following metal left leg was stopped. If it had swung forward, it would have kicked her.

The autonomous movement system was aware of her presence.

That was an amateurish way of carrying itself, but the focus was on safety first.

*...It's fine as long as I don't position myself wrong.*

She understood why Musashi's 6th Special Duty Officer stood on her god of war's shoulder. On top of the god of war was a safe position that gave the god of war the most freedom of movement.

*In that case,* thought Yoshiyasu while double-checking her own equipment.

She had a long sword on her back and a short sword on either hip.

She reached for the left short sword first.

"Let's go."

"Ohh, will you show me what you can do?"

"Judge," she confirmed while moving forward.

She drew the short sword into empty air while walking. And...

"—————"

Behind her, Righteousness used the same motion to draw the sword on its left hip.

It was a *yoroi-doshi* capable of piercing god of war armor. And with that thick blade...

"It can chop off a mechanical phoenix wing."

With that Yoshiyasu stepped forward.

"Oh?"

Yoshiaki watched Righteousness moving through the distant street.

She stood on a roof to gain a view from above the city.

This was just as she had finished her break at the teahouse and said "now then" with Kani.



In that view of the Odawara city, Righteousness drew its sword.

This was her first time seeing that girl fight.

*...Now, how will this turn out?*

Yoshiaki placed a fan over her mouth to hide her smile.

Righteousness's gait was definitely Yoshiyasu's. At the same time, it made moves to protect her.

For Mogami, gods of war were associated with the neighboring nation of Date.

Yoshiaki had seen quite a few gods of war in her time, but Righteousness's autonomous movement was very well done.

Great care had been put into it.

Care for the god of war and for the pilot, Yoshiyasu.

Autonomous movement experience came from how many different actions the god of war had repeated and learned. They also learned by taking in information on the outside world and creating links between the external situation and its movements.

That learning was generally done while the god of war was on standby.

The high level of Righteousness's autonomous movement was the result of a fulfilling time during training and on standby.

The pilot combined with their god of war, but it was not just during that combination that the pilot's traits were apparent in them. Traces of the pilot would also show themselves when the pilot was away. So...

"You were shown great care and you showed it yourself, Yoshiyasu."

"Is that Satomi Student Council President Yoshiyasu-san's god of war!?"

"Testament. I expect it is about to put on quite a show."

Just as she said that, Righteousness moved forward.

The battle was beginning.

So, said Yoshiaki in her heart before saying it aloud.

She spoke directly to Kani who stood on the roof in front of her, checking the corner of the roof with the bottom of her foot.

“So let us begin as well.”

“Testament! ...Thank you for this opportunity!”

Kani bowed.

*...Oh?*

At the same time, a blade filled Yoshiaki's vision.

Kani had immediately launched a spear attack without a single motion to betray it.

And the very first attack was to the face, blinding Yoshiaki.

*...Excellent resolve.*

Yoshiaki also moved.

The two Mogami Representatives began their battles in the Odawara city.

The battle between a god of war and a mechanical phoenix came down to an exchange of shots and slashes.

The road was about 12 meters wide. That was plenty wide for the god of war to move around. It was also wide enough for the mechanical phoenix if it kept its wings folded.

The two forms were in constant motion in that space.

One was a golden mechanical phoenix.

Genan's Gold Crown Bird had its wings folded but fired from their base and bottom side. It skillfully used its thick legs to move its body and fall back with movements unthinkable for its bird foundation.

It did not only use close-range shots to attack. It occasionally used something else against its enemy.

“Take this...!”

Its beak.

The tip had been made into a ram. The mechanical phoenix would thrust it forward like a spear to deter its enemy's advance.

The mechanical phoenix's enemy was Righteousness which acted as an enormous copy of Yoshiyasu.

The autonomous god of war dodged the mechanical phoenix's shells and sliced through them with the blade in its right hand.

“———”

And while making quick work of the cannon blasts, Righteousness moved forward.

But each time Righteousness took a step forward, a series of cannon blasts attacked its giant form.

It was a close-range rapid-fire attack. The autocannons fired on Righteousness at a rate of 6 times a second. With the short sword striking them, the resultant noise was like a never-ending metallic scream.

The shells produced continuous sparks and occasionally left scorch marks in the roofs or walls of the houses bordering the road.

But Righteousness still managed to move forward and push at the mechanical phoenix.

It advanced.

There was a third figure who pursued the movements and scattering sparks on that battlefield.

It was Yoshiyasu.

Wearing a hat, she advanced while catching up to Righteousness and being passed once more.

The short sword in her right hand was shorter than the *yoroi-doshi* in Righteousness's hand.

But Righteousness was copying her movements. The girl and machine used their identical actions to endure the mechanical phoenix's cannon blasts.

“Oh, damn...!” shouted Yoshiyasu. “This isn't working right...!”

Yoshiyasu felt a cold sweat on her back.

For a god of war pilot, standing on the battlefield outside of the god of war was just plain dangerous.

After all, they removed most of their equipment in order to board the god of war.

There was an emergency rescue pack below the god of war's cockpit, but it only contained clothing and food, not equipment for survival on the battlefield.

Generally, anytime a god of war pilot ended up outside their god of war on the battlefield, it meant they had been "abandoned" there.

She was lucky to have the vest and few other pieces of equipment she did have.

*...But once you're outside, you can really understand the significance of a god of war.*

With a god of war, you could fight another god of war, a mechanical phoenix, or a dragon.

The pilot was defenseless on the battlefield, but they were nearly invincible as a god of war.

That imbalance led to an understanding.

"People are such weak creatures...!"

Without surrounding themselves with a great power, they could not resist a great enemy.

But inside that great power, it was difficult to strengthen themselves.

She had seen that dynamic before.

*...In me!*

She was inside Musashi. She was inside Mogami.

She was also inside something much larger and using that to face a great enemy. However...

“Damn...!”

Everyone could be isolated on the battlefield.

The great power surrounding her and everything that would support her would not help her with this duel.

Right here and now, she was alone.

This might be the last time she could be isolated like this. And yet...

*...I can't overwhelm him...!*

Her enemy was Houjou Genan. He was the boss of Houjou's mechanical phoenix unit which was their mechanized air force. His small body was well suited for piloting mechanical phoenixes and he had supported Houjou land from the air for many long years.

Satomi had possessed an air force and god of war forces, but they had mostly fought to protect their nation from Edo Bay. They had rarely attacked Houjou land.

Genan was one of the reasons for that.

When Satomi was intercepting Houjou attackers, his mechanical phoenix unit would fly in from Houjou land as a deterrent.

He would find a gap in Satomi's defenses and do things like have transport ships drop strange tentacles.

And after finding the perfect method to discourage their actions, he would laugh loudly.

*...Well, I don't actually know that he laughed.*

*Maybe I just had a persecution complex. Maybe he was covered in a cold sweat the whole time. But I have a hard time imagining him sweating while dropping those tentacles. That was clearly just harassment. Well, that's fine. Wait, no. It's not fine at all.*

But she had not faced him since leaving Satomi.

She and Righteousness were very different from back then.

But now that she had stepped out onto the battlefield...

“Damn...!” shouted Yoshiyasu while looking up at her enemy and moving along with Righteousness. “Has nothing changed...!?”

She focused her eyes, swung her arm, controlled her body, and moved forward.

Each time, an intense noise and a shower of sparks filled the air while Righteousness’s feet and Gold Crown Bird’s steps shook the ground. Their movements whipped up a wind which pushed her body toward the ground, but...

*...What does that matter?*

She felt the summer heat and the oil-smelling machine heat approaching like a wave, but she simply kept pressing onward.

She advanced.

“Ohh...?”

Naomasa followed Righteousness’s movements with her eyes and opened a new sign frame by her hands.

Without taking her eyes off of Righteousness, she raised the sign frame to eye level with her right hand.

It was a telescope spell sign frame.

The magnified view of Righteousness was covered in smoke and the sounds of sparks.

*...That’s about 3 kilometers away.*

Aboard the Musashi, judging distance by sound was a common practice. And from that great a distance...

“Splendidly done,” said Futayo while looking to the watermelon sashimi Horizon was making. “Even if that is a mechanized rapid-fire attack, handling such a great density of attacks from such close range is no easy task. Also, I believe Yoshy...-sama is doing this while not aboard the god of war.”

“What do you...mean...?” asked Suzu.

“Judge,” replied Adele. “Aboard the god of war, the god of war’s processing power could be used to raise her perception speed. That means she could react to the enemy’s attacks, but the Satomi Student Council President is doing it while outside the god of war.”

“Is she not aware what she’s doing?”

“She has to have noticed,” said Naomasa. “Besides, this has to be the first time she’s done this.”

Naomasa watched Righteousness eliminating the enemy attacks with quick movements.

She kept her movements compact and she moved forward. There were no contradictions in her tactics. When focused on compact movements, she had to be close to her enemy if her attacks were to hit.

*...That said, you could still call her actions inexperienced.*

Keeping your movements short was a primarily defensive action.

When launching an attack, a longer movement increased the reach and the destructive power. This likely meant Yoshiyasu was still unable to switch between the two styles.

“Oh...so that’s it.”

It hit Naomasa.

The high level of the autonomous movements meant a lot of time had been spent on it in training and standby.

So who had she trained with to learn those defensive actions?

Just as Naomasa wondered that, she heard an unexpected voice.

The idiot spoke up as if breathing a sigh of relief.

“...Yoshiyori is there.”

Yoshiyasu’s sword slashes were directed at Ujikuni’s mechanical phoenix.

But the idiot said something else.

“Yoshiyori, that’s not going to cut it. ...You never taught Flatty how to attack.

That's why she's having so much trouble."

Yoshiyasu groaned.

*...Dammit!*

She had left Satomi, gone to IZUMO, and lost everything except for herself and Righteousness on the way back.

She had moved to Musashi, built up a connection with Mogami, and learned her way around combat and politics, but...

"I can't overwhelm him!?"

The enemy before her was not as strong as her sister.

Nor was he as strong as Yoshiyori.

Or so she thought.

That had to be the case. After all...

*...Those two are the only ones I should be no match for...!*

*Wait, no,* she thought.

Yoshiaki and the Musashi group also counted. Their Vice Chancellor and other combat officers were the wild type, but they were her allies. She found she no longer minded if she was no match for an ally.

That was an unexpected area of growth.

Still, she could now reproduce the movements from her training against those two people she cared for.

At the time, she had been unable to get a single attack in on them.

She did not want to accept that *that* also applied to this opponent. *That* would bring shame to the Satomi name.

Houjou would become a relic of the past here, so...

"I will win...!"



Genan gulped inside the mechanical phoenix's cockpit.

But this was not a sign of concern. It was a joyous response.

*...Now she's going for it...!*

Had that Satomi country girl – that child who was always hiding behind Yatsufusa – managed to improve this much?

She was more than ready to fight on the front line.

Of course, she was still not worthy of Yatsufusa.

Her attacks were insufficient and her movements lacked an overwhelming force. The Yoshiyori who was her sister had used elegant movements. Her sword fighting had possessed a flow that made it feel like there was no opening between her attacks and defenses.

The previous generation Yoshiyori had used intense movements. His sword fighting had possessed a strength that silenced his surroundings with the actions of his blade.

This girl lacked either of those powers.

*But,* thought Genan as he fired his cannons and thrust his ram forward. *This may be this girl's strength.*

She merely dealt with his attacks and advanced. It was simple, but it was the most important thing to do in combat.

Attacks had to reach their target first and foremost.

“...Indeed.”

Genan had fought both of the Yoshiyoris.

For a long-lived, he had lived only a fraction of a long life. But his age was quite high for his clan. Those two had been difficult opponents to face toward the end of his primary fighting days.

*...Honestly.*

He had wanted to ask those two to stop making his old bones suffer from the burden of the high mobility and to stop making him spend all-nighters putting together detailed strategies.

It had been an honor.

And he had ended up living longer than those two who were younger than him.

Of course, Houjou land was what mattered to him. He knew the trends of other nations were a secondary concern.

But since he would be stepping back from this active role once Houjou was destroyed...

“It’s going to be lonely. Hey...”

Genan gulped.

“I feel a chill in my old bones when I think about how I have no friends outside of Houjou.”

If anything, he specialized in combat more than politics.

Everyone like that had to have had the same thought with Houjou’s fall approaching.

*...Once Houjou is gone, could I visit my most formidable opponents and have a quick battle as a form of greeting?*

But with Satomi destroyed, he had assumed he could never have them as an *opponent* again. However...

“So Satomi still has someone left who forces me to get serious when I challenge them just for fun?”

He changed the cockpit’s mode. He opened a sign frame and fixed his body in place. That solidified the position of not just his torso but his head and everything else too.

“Sight devices: eye synchronization. Link with sensory reaction spell.”

He did not touch the controls. Sign frames covered not just his hands and feet but his shoulders, neck, and closed eyes too.

“Sensory reaction. ...Link to mechanical phoenix.”

This was a prototype system. It was a crucial test for the next generation machines.

“An open combination. ...I will test this on you, new star of Satomi.”

Yoshiyasu noticed a change in the enemy's movements.

Specifically, in the cannon blasts, ram attacks, and body movements.

*...There's a human element in them!?*

This was not a machine. There was something uncertain in the movements, like when a person had combined with a god of war.

“It can't be...”

“Oh, it most certainly can.”

She heard Genan's scratchy voice. He sent an attack her way, and...

*...Here he comes!*

He pushed in.

Genan's Gold Crown Bird had primarily been falling back as it attacked, but now it pushed forward as it attacked.

“The reaction speed provided by the combination system is the greatest advantage of a god of war. Meanwhile, a mechanical phoenix is shaped so differently from our bodies that the disadvantages of the control system are too great even if you do combine. However, Satomi Yoshiyasu.”

He fired at her blade.

He deflected it. But not forward. Backward.

*...Kh...!*

The enemy was trying to move forward. Yoshiyasu raised her blade in response.

“Did you leave the control system in place but linked the sensory and control systems!?”

“Correct...!”

*That's ridiculous,* thought Yoshiyasu. Combining with a god of war was meant to provide the pilot with the high-speed sensory processing, but that was only

possible when combining with the god of war and receiving the support of the cooling system and other systems.

If you linked the machine with the sensory system while your body remained untouched, the burden would fall on your physical body.

That burden normally required a god of war's cooling and support, so how much of it could be eliminated with just the divine protections placed on your body?

"Are you suicidal!?"

"I will not die. No, I will not die. Because there is a time limit," said Genan while sending attacks her way. "But I expect this will be necessary in an upcoming battle. Don't you think?"

"What do you mean?"

"Ho ho ho. ...The Kantou Liberation."

Genan laughed.

"See? It will be necessary."

A moment later, Yoshiyasu realized she had been careless.

While firing some more, the enemy had sent in a ram attack.

She had been distracted by the simplistic pattern of the cannon blasts and her blade was not enough to block the ram arriving behind it.

*...I'll have to defend...!*

As soon as she crossed her arms in a defensive posture, she heard a loud noise and Righteousness fell back.

Genan had taken control of the battle.

Genan sighed.

*...This is rough...!*

He had tested this several times already.

But real combat was different.

He had thought the limited environment of a duel would make it easier, but this may have been even worse than an actual battlefield. He had no allies here and he was forced to constantly focus on the enemy.

Also, Gold Crown Bird was meant for use on the ground. Since he had to be constantly thinking about the ground as he moved, he had to use a variety of muscles even more than his head.

*...This is not good.*

“I can’t keep complaining about my old bones as an excuse.”

But he was no longer piloting with his arms and legs. The signals sent from his brain and passing through his nerves were detected and responded to by the sign frames placed over the different parts of his body. Most of the responses came from his neck and shoulders, so the response was strongest there.

It felt like he had become the mechanical phoenix from his neck down.

*...Ho ho.*

He had never expected to test a system like this near the very end of his time as an active fighter.

This would surely become the standard for mechanical phoenixes in the future.

Even if Houjou was destroyed, the technology would remain. He could see the future in his hands. So...

“The present! This is about the present! Satomi!”

Not the past. Not the future.

The present would overwrite the past. And if he was to have peace of mind about the future, the present was what mattered.

And in that limited time...

“Show me the present, Satomi...!”

Just as he shouted that, Righteousness showed him something after having fallen back.

It had drawn the other *yoroi-doshi* in its left hand.

It was the length of a *wakizashi*. And the god of war's stance was...

*...Two sword style!*

It knocked aside his attacks and moved forward. The enemy intended to carve a narrow path through the battlefield as a weapon of advancement.

"Don't think you can reach me like that...!"

Genan smiled and made his attack.

Ookubo watched that giant battle from close by.

This was her first time seeing a god of war battle from close up. She had been below deck guiding the evacuation when Sanada's Lindwurm had arrived, so she had not seen that.

A great power was running wild in front of her.

Metal arms swung, metal feet stepped, and both destroyed cannon blasts that would have blown away a person.

The sparks were pretty. The scattering noise continued without end, so she had started tuning it out.

There was simply the movements, the wind, the sparks, the smoke, and...

"Wow..."

The god of war was pushed back. But immediately...

"Ohh..."

The god of war pushed forward.

The phrase "back and forth" came to mind and Ookubo belatedly realized she had stopped sweating. And...

*...She's there...*

She saw someone at the god of war's feet.

It was Satomi Student Council President Satomi Yoshiyasu.

Instead of riding the god of war, she was controlling it remotely in an act that

could only be described as prideful.

But that girl was moving forward in a position far more dangerous than Ookubo's.

Even when the god of war fell back, she moved forward. She did not let herself fall back.

*...Why not?*

She found the answer as soon as she asked the question.

This battle was against Houjou.

It was a history recreation of the Siege of Odawara, but it was Satomi's final battle against Houjou.

She could not fall back. She was the lone member of Satomi, but she carried a burden here.

*...Silly girl.*

Ookubo stopped thinking and reached that conclusion instead.

This was an important battle. It would be best for Yoshiyasu to ignore her pride and burden so she could do what was needed to win.

If she did not win, the rest was meaningless.

"Silly girl..."

With that, Ookubo looked to the girl's back.

She looked at the back of a fellow second year name inheritor who was only trying to move straight ahead.

Attacks were exchanged at close range.

There was nothing but movement and sparks between the two sides and they would sometimes alternately push forward and fall back, but other times, one side would push forward and then push forward some more.

But one thing was protected in this battle of constant movement and reversals of positions.

They did not destroy the city.

They both led a nation.

To Genan, this was a precious city even if it was to be destroyed.

For Yoshiyasu, it was a civilian city even if it was part of an enemy nation.

Some might destroy it, but these two were identical on this front.

These fighters would settle this through nothing more than fighting. So...

“...Ohh!”

“That isn’t going to work...!”

With that short exchange of words, the sparks of cannon fire and sword strikes eloquently displayed their stances and willpower.

Genan sent his power out to pierce her.

Yoshiyasu sent her power out to reach him.

The two of them created a balanced exchange, but they were not attempting equilibrium.

Genan raised his mechanical phoenix’s hips to increase his charging power in what amounted to a bipedal dragon’s stance.

Yoshiyasu lowered her hips to lower her center of gravity so she would not be forced back.

As a result, Righteousness was exposed to a series of attacks from above, but...

“———!”

Yoshiyasu spun her hat around backwards to secure her upwards vision.

“There...!”

She sent out her right blade to defend against the cannon blast.

Yoshiyasu did not choose simple defense.

She sent her blade vertically into the glowing ether cannon blast.



The blast was split and it scattered to either side as it exploded.

Yoshiyasu extended Righteousness's right wing to the back and swung the head to the left. The bursting light cannon's force passed through the location vacated by its lowered wing and tilted head.

But the blade passed through.

And Yoshiyasu moved forward. She first leaned forward and pressed her body into the raised right blade.

The fragments of light flew and light scattered through the air. Within that, Righteousness launched itself forward.

"Go, Righteousness...!"

The base of the blade was up against her right shoulder now, so she could thrust it forward again with her right arm.

Of course, she had performed that action countless times before now.

If this played out like before, the enemy would fire a series of cannon blasts to deflect the right short sword. However...

"Go!"

Righteousness stopped pushing out its right arm. It let its right shoulder push the raised short sword while moving its entire body forward.

This surprise attack was made by using the previous pattern as a feint.

Of course, this was when the enemy would fire his cannons.

But this time, Righteousness would not deflect the enemy projectiles with a snap of its wrist or arm.

Its elbow was bent and its wrist locked in place. And...

*...Thrust upward!*

Yoshiyasu switched to a backhand grip on the raised right blade.

She took a stance that allowed her to strike at the arriving cannon blast with the tip of the short sword.

She would pierce it. Even if the enemy made a rapid-fire attack,

Righteousness could support itself with its body and push forward all at once.

*...As long as I'm prepared for a certain level of damage!*

She was prepared for that as she suddenly shifted into the new stance.

Meanwhile, the enemy's cannon blast arrived.

The first shot did hit. But it hit the tip of the prepared blade.

A tremor ran through Righteousness and a clang of metallic impact came from the right of its back, but she did not mind.

A series of similar attacks was coming, so she leaned forward and thought about what was to come.

"Go...!"

She had Righteousness step forward.

Immediately, Yoshiyasu heard an unexpected noise. Or rather, lack of noise. She heard nothing at all.

*...Huh?*

She had expected to hear the impacts from a series of cannon blasts, but she actually heard nothing at all.

No, she could hear the sounds of hers and the enemy's movements. But...

*...I haven't heard any cannon blasts beyond the first one?*

The expected rapid-fire attack had not arrived. Thus the silence.

Genan had stopped firing.

*...Not bad...!*

Genan had seen through Righteousness's movements.

Yoshiyasu's skill was not at the level of the previous two generations, but she had reached the Special Duty Officer level. And she went somewhat higher when it came to her specialty of simple advancement.

In the past, he would not have been able to see through her attack and feint.

He would only have been able to sense danger and move away.

But that had changed.

*...My senses show it to me...!*

Righteousness had shifted to a different defense and advancement method in battle.

He had seen through the instantaneous feint and advance because of his accelerated senses.

Of course, his human body remained unchanged, so his high-speed senses were not perfect. It only provided 1/10 – or in his case, 1/4 – of the benefit a god of war would have.

But he had seen it. He had grasped the initial movement of the enemy changing her movement.

The rest had been a gamble.

Should he move or not? It was the following thought that had made up his mind for him: *...Well, I guess I'll do everything I can.*

He was ending his time as an active fighter.

He would leave his results here as data for the next generation and he would retire at the Kantou Liberation.

During the Kantou Liberation, he would ride a “cutting-edge craft” constructed in the old way without sensory acceleration.

Even as Houjou faced its destruction, the new and old were in conflict. In the field of air force development, the old had been driven out. He was using this open combination system in order to acquire combat data and as a sign to the next generation.

Others had followed his example.

He used this machine to send new data to them. And if he was to achieve results here...

“Now is the time...!”

Genan was already moving.

He used the ram on the tip of the bow.

The pile bunk attack used the neck joint and it targeted Righteousness's face devices. The way he swung his entire body a bit to the left was a gentle motion he could not have done with a traditional mechanical phoenix control system.

The force of this strike was harder to dodge than a cannon blast. His split-second decision had been to move his partially-combined "body".

The attack avoided losing its initial momentum from cannon recoil.

Meanwhile, Righteousness had yet to extend its arm.

He would extend his neck first, so there was only one thing to think.

*...Please hit...!*

Genan used his body to strike strongly forward.

Yoshiyasu made her decision in an instant. She decided to stop her opponent.

But her current action put her at a disadvantage. She had charged forward herself.

How could she transform that into a "stopping action"?

And how could she dodge the enemy's ram?

Yoshiyasu gave it no thought whatsoever. She simply reacted with *what she needed to do*.

She only had to collapse Righteousness's stance.

And by moving it into the next action supplied by her subconscious. She would connect it to the next action that had permeated her body thanks to training.

"————"

Yoshiyasu swung Righteousness's left leg forward as it advanced.

Righteousness left its left leg behind so as not to step on its master.

A moment later, Genan's Gold Crown Bird pierced Righteousness's face with its ram.

But the position had shifted.

Because Righteousness had left its left leg behind, its body sank down and twisted to the left.

The dog ear that functioned as an auditory device and the armor on the right side of the head were taken away.

After the impact to the head, the control system reinitialized for just an instant, but...

"Righteousness! ...Stand up!"

Yoshiyasu's voice reached the remaining auditory device on the left side.

Its master's voice could be used as an activation signal. That took priority over all else, so all the unnecessary boot-up checks were canceled.

It moved with its master's wishes taking priority.

Righteousness stood up with the mechanical phoenix's ram resting atop its right shoulder.

Genan's Gold Crown Bird had failed to destroy Righteousness's face. And if its face was there...

"———!"

The standing motion became an upper shoulder attack.

An intense noise rang out and a shock raced through both machines.

Metallic creaking came from the mechanical phoenix's neck joints and head.

Righteousness wobbled, but it used that time to adjust the other settings that had been canceled.

Yoshiyasu moved while aware the timing was only just barely working out.

"Pierce him...!"

The short sword held to the right shot straight up.

The motion would lop off the mechanical phoenix's head from directly below.  
And...

"There..."

Yoshiyasu used a left-handed underhand throw to toss the other sword forward.

Genan's mechanical phoenix was targeting her with the cannon on its right wing.

It twisted its body to launch the attack which collided with the thrown short sword.

There was an explosion and the repelled short sword stabbed into the ground.

The right sword continued racing toward the mechanical phoenix's head.

"—————"

Yoshiyasu saw the result of her attack.

The mechanical phoenix had let its entire body collapse backwards to evade it.

*...I dodged it...!*

The attack from below had been effective, but it had also helped Genan. Because she had been striking up at him from below, he had had an easier time leaning back to dodge.

The series of movements had worked well for him.

When the impact from below had hit, he had honestly given up. *So this is it*, he had thought.

But that resignation had affected the movement and control of the mechanical phoenix.

The relaxed mechanical phoenix neck had not opposed the impact from below. The multiple metal joints had been lightly wrapped back and then knocked straight up by the god of war's shoulder.

The impact had left through the top, and...

“Ho ho...!”

Genan’s body had been released from the open combination system.

The impact and damage had triggered a safety which released the combination and the linking spell for the sensory acceleration.

He reached for the control sign frame. The pressure-sensitive sign frame did not change its feel as the craft attempted to change. It felt familiar in his hands.

So when he pulled back with all his might, the craft raised its head and...

“Dodged it...!”

And because he had twisted a bit to the left before, his left cannon was still aimed at the enemy.

Righteousness had ended up in a stance with both arms raised.

Its torso was wide open.

Throwing the left short sword had been a mistake on Yoshiyasu’s part.

She must have been unsure whether to respond to the distant left cannon with attack or defense.

She had trouble hitting attacks over a long distance.

This was another example of that.

He had bent and stepped back, so Righteousness’s stance and weapons could not reach him.

He would likely have lost if he had been up against the previous two generations. So...

“Let this be a lesson to you as we end this Houjou battle...!”

Genan raised his voice and used his hands to send a signal to the firing control.

Just then, he saw a certain color.

He saw a silver line in the sign frame displaying the skyward vision from the tip of the bow.

...A short sword?

It was the one Righteousness had held in its right hand. It had thrown it into the sky.

It had already lost the left short sword, so this left Righteousness unarmed. However...

“It can’t be...”

On the sign frame providing the view dead ahead, Genan saw Righteousness holding a new weapon.

It was a *tachi*.

But it had not worn this blade on its hip.

This long blade had been equipped on its back. Righteousness had placed both hands on its hilt.

Yoshiyasu moved.

She simply grasped the hilt on her back and sent her body forward.

Her primary attack techniques were limited to extreme close-range, so this was her only way of making a long-range sword strike.

Her stance and everything else forcibly required this long-range attack.

In other words, she had to draw the sword and strike from overhead.

But she could not just swing her arms for this.

She had to move her leg forward, lean her upper body forward, and swing the *tachi* with her abs.

She had to send it forward with her legs, hips, chest, shoulders, elbows, and wrists in that order. Only then could it...

...Reach him...!



“Ohh,” said Genan.

He was responding to the attack from overhead. And the extreme-close-range shoulder attack leading into it.

They had both been unrefined, but...

*...She has not lost the connection...*

The previous generation had possessed intensity and the generation before that had possessed elegance. Would this lead to a fusion of the two?

Would that be the end result of this small girl’s somewhat hesitant movements?

But for now, she had connected it all together. The enemy’s attack had reached Genan’s craft.

“Well done...!” he shouted while realizing his right wing’s cannon blast had been destroyed by the blade. “So Satomi was not lost...!”

The blast washed over Ookubo as wind.

Gold Crown Bird’s right wing had been sliced by Righteousness’s sword and then the explosive blast had caused even more damage. The metal split and, more than just sparks, scorched metal fragments burst forth like innards.

And the blast struck Gold Crown Bird’s body.

But the shockwave came from the wing’s base.

Since the frame was tough, the wing was not torn off and the blast had nowhere but the sky to go.

The sound of torn air lasted an instant. Gold Crown Bird’s wing was bent downwards. As for the main body...

“...!”

It shook from the intense impact.

But that was all.

There was a creaking noise and the reverberation of the nearly-broken wing stabbing into the earth, but the mechanical phoenix endured.

Meanwhile, Righteousness crouched low while slowly returning the sword to its back.

While it sheathed its sword at such close range to the enemy, Ookubo heard a voice.

It was the Satomi Student Council President. Her shoulders rose and fell with her breaths as she spoke to her enemy.

“...I reached you.”

She took a deep breath and repeated the words she had taught to herself.

“I reached you...!”

Yoshiyasu heard a voice reply with “testament”.

It was the mechanical phoenix. Gold Crown Bird extended its head downward like the victor even though it could barely move. And it spoke to the crouching dog.

“I saw it for myself. Thus...”

She heard Genan’s voice.

“Is this your win? At the very least, my mechanical phoenix can no longer move.”

“No, I’m in a similar position.”

Yoshiyasu belatedly sensed her own inexperience and placed a hand on her right cheek.

“The previous attack caused issues with Righteousness’s right auditory device and right facial sight device. So...”

She raised her right hand somewhat out to the side.

Righteousness started to follow the motion, but...

“It can’t perceive anything beyond this.”

She tried waving her hand, but Righteousness did not mimic it. It did seem to follow the movement up to the elbow, so the shoulder to the elbow moved in a confused sort of way. Because...

“There is a blind spot between that and the flank sight device.”

When avoiding the ram, she should have moved the head to the left and back. Since she had only tilted it to the side, it had not escaped the impact and the devices had been torn away. That rushed decision was proof that she had yet to calm herself.

*...I still have a long way to go.*

She felt like she had gotten closer to her sister and Yoshiyori, but her method had been poor. Still, she really did feel like she had reached that level. So...

“This was a victory for Satomi.”

But...

“It was a draw for Mogami as a part of the punishment of Houjou. ... Righteousness cannot hope to match an expert in this state.”

“Testament.”

Genan’s response did not come from the speakers.

She looked up to see the mechanical phoenix’s cockpit hatch had opened, revealing the old man.

He was resting his head in his hand and he spoke with a bitter smile in his voice.

“Are you going to *go on* and win, Satomi? ...Some of our young people will miss the battles with Satomi, but others will be aggravated but accepting of the new state of affairs.”

“How happy for them.”

Yoshiyasu realized she was smiling a little.

As a member of Satomi, she had no future generation or companions the way Genan did. However...

“Tell the rest of Houjou that was an excellent battle. After all...”

She looked far into the east where a giant ship was visible in the sky.

It was the Musashi.

Yoshiyasu spoke as she looked up at its grand form.

“It was thanks to Houjou that Satomi accomplished what it did.”

“What Musashi needs more than anything in these duels is wins over Houjou, but they just lost twice in a row!?”

Masazumi shouted to Naomasa who was viewing the city through a telescope spell.

The information on her own sign frame provided essentially the same information that Naomasa had. But...

“Maa?”

Tsukinowa tapped his large foreleg on the part that said “draw”.

He probably meant that as a correction, so she patted the anteater’s head. Regardless...

“This is kind of bad!”

“Okayyyy, Seijun-kun!” said the idiot. “We have strayed a fair bit from your strategy!”

“If you ask me,” said Horizon. “Masazumi-sama relies on other people too much.”

“Heh heh,” said the idiot sister. “It looks like she really should have argued for a flashier and simpler type of war yesterday.”

“If you ask me,” said Nenji. “Won’t this be a troublesome miscalculation for the other nations as well?”

*...The real problem is how I feel like all of them are right...*

After all, the rules said draws were invalid.

And if Houjou Genan could no longer use his mechanical phoenix, Genan would leave the battle without passing his rights on to anyone.

“That leaves 4 from Houjou. ...But Ujiteru is taking a break and who knows what he’ll do from here on.”

“Judge.” Gin held a prosthetic hand over her eyes and looked to the Odawara city. “The battles last 30 minutes, so there will likely be some people whose rest times and battle times do not match up.”

“Judge. They can be on the same battlefield, but the timing of their breaks means they never meet each other.”

Masazumi held a hand to her forehead and sighed.

“Have this, Masazumi-sama,” said Horizon next to her.

The offered plate contained watermelon sashimi.

*...Why did she slice it into blocks?*

It was strange to see the rind curled up like peeled apple skin.

On the other side, the Tachibana Couple were politely picking up and eating pieces with chopsticks, while Futayo was piercing them with skewers to eat several at a time. Both options seemed right yet wrong, but what even qualified as “right” in this world?

Further away, Mary and Crossunite were discussing it.

“Oh? You were right, Master Tenzou. It is surprisingly good with salt.”

“Judge. The salt helps the sweetness stand out.”

**Mar-Ga:** “Can’t someone make a law to execute anyone who tries to earn easy points?”

**Azuma:** “...No matter what I say, Miriam says it isn’t good enough, so could you also make an assistance law?”

**Gold Mar:** “...I think you’ve earned more than enough points already... Yeah...”

**Silver Wolf:** “That situation sounds awfully familiar...”

**Asama:** “Wh-why are you looking my way, Mito!? You aren’t going to get anything out of me!”

Did everyone like earning points that much? That would be a product of their managed society.

But the issue here was the national points, not the personal points.

*...Umm, how are Houjou and our forces doing?*

“Houjou has lost once to Sviet Rus and tied once with Satomi. We have won once to Mouri and lost once to Date. And right now Mogami’s Yoshiaki and Hashiba’s Kani are battling, right?”

When she asked how that was going, a grinding sound came from the Odawara city.

Masazumi was not the combat type, but even she could tell something was being destroyed.

*...Huh?*

She turned around and saw something. The roofs in the northeast part of Odawara were being torn away. Across a few different locations, they were deeply gouged into and eliminated.

“What was that...?”

Had a multi-shell gravity pressure round been fired? No, more importantly...

“Who did that?”

Masazumi quickly had Tsukinowa open a sign frame.

Who was fighting in northeast Odawara?

“Mogami Yoshiaki and Kani Saizou...!?”

“Judge,” confirmed Mitotsudaira with her eyebrows raised in a smile.

“Mogami should have only participated in the Siege of Odawara and the Keichou-Dewa Conflict, so by making an enemy of Hashiba here, they are siding with Musashi!”

“Hmm.” Masazumi glared at the Odawara city. “Kani is from Hashiba, but defeating Hashiba in this battle doesn’t really get us much... Oh, but I guess it will reduce the enemy’s numbers. ...We’ll have to be happy with that...”

“D-don’t sound so sad! Let’s keep things bright! Okay, Masazumi!?”

Kani heard her heart pounding in her ears.

She stood on an Odawara roof and a giant hole was opened nearby.

*...What is this!?*

The hole had a diameter of nearly 30 meters. And the destruction took the shape of a sphere.

She had never seen this before. Which should not surprise her given her opponent: “Mogami Chancellor...!”

A half-destroyed house stood 30 meters away.

Yoshiaki stood on its roof.

She raised a fan in front of her face, pressed the tip to her mouth, and kept a smile in her eyes.

“Ohh, so you dodged it. Good job.”

Kani could tell her pulse raced even faster when she heard those casual words.

If she had not dodged this, she would have been eliminated along with the houses and the ground.

*...Wow.*

She could instantly lose everything due to a single decision.

When that understanding hit her, sweat began pouring from her body. And...

“I quite like children who will continue fighting me.”

All of a sudden, there were giant breasts in front of her eyes.

They belonged to Yoshiaki. She had covered the 30m gap without showing any advance movement.

And she crouched down in front of Kani.

“Tell me if you’re scared, okay?”

She moved to lightly tap her fan against Kani’s forehead.

So Kani dodged. There was no chance the woman intended to make that sort of “contact” at a time like this, so Kani quickly pushed down with the bottom of her feet to distance herself from Yoshiaki.

But she could not.

*...Eh!?*

The fan pressed against her forehead sent two lines racing to the bottom of her feet. That force seemed light, but it fully restricted her movement.

She had been counterbalanced.

“Are you scared?”

Kani tried to shake her head, but she could not.

Even that was suppressed and stopped.

Her upperclassmen might be able to escape these bonds, but for her...

“I don’t understand!”

That was her honest opinion. This went beyond fighting or not fighting.

But there was one thing she had to do.

“I will do my best!”

The opponent before her eyes may have been far beyond her reach. If she could be suppressed so easily, then she had all but lost already. But...

“...I will do my best!”

Kani shouted for the foundation of her power – for her weapon.

“Sasamura...!”

Yoshiaki saw the identity of the previous attack.

This was the attack that had filled her vision before.

*...An ejected cowlings spear...!?*

A single cowlings spear was ejected from the empty air behind Kani’s right shoulder.



“Pierce her!”

The weapon responded to Kani’s voice. A straight-line attack was thrust toward Yoshiaki’s face.

“Ohh...!”

She dodged to the side. She made an outward step which was hard for spear-wielders to handle.

But just as she circled to the left, which was to Kani’s right, Yoshiaki sensed the beginnings of a wind.

It came from Kani on her right.

She recognized the sound of pressure. It was the same ejection sound she had just heard. Which meant...

*...A second one!?*

She saw the glint of a blade in the right corner of her vision.

It was indeed a second one.

Could Kani’s weapons be fired in any direction from behind her? If so...

“Here...!”

Just as Yoshiaki took a step, she struck the empty air with her fan.

She felt the definite tactile feedback of a hit. Sparks scattered and something flew trembling out into the air.

“A third cowlings spear?”

Her question received no response.

The small girl was already charging toward her. And below the girl’s feet...

*...A fourth one...!*

Kani kicked off the ejected cowlings spear to accelerate herself.

And that was not the end of it.

“Here I go!”

With that announcement, all of the cowlings spears vanished from around

Kani.

But that disappearance was only a temporary thing.

“Oh?” said Yoshiaki as she took a step back. In front of her, Kani swung both her hands.

In response, something was ejected like shells behind her.

“Eight Sasamura Spears...”

The cowling spears with bamboo grass blades were fired with the mobility of a powerful throw.

# Chapter 51: Family Leading to Memories

# 第五十一章

## 『記憶至りの家族』

頑張れば  
何かが見えると  
そう思いますか  
配点 (自分)



*If you do your best*

*Do you think*

*You will see something?*

### **Point Allocation (Yourself)**

Multiple explosive attacks raced above Odawara.

They were spears.

They were wielded by a single girl and they pursued a nonhuman woman who did not hide her fox tail or ears.

It occurred below the summer sun and above the city in which other battles took place.

“————”

The spears smashed up the city.

The sounds of destruction and breaking came from a group of 4m cowering spears. There were 8 of them and they continually pierced downwards from the sky as they moved ever forward, almost like a praying mantis's front legs.

The 8 rapid-fire strikes were no longer spear attacks.

They were a cluster bombing of pile bunkers.

The first three opened holes in the roof the two fighters traveled along, the next three smashed it to pieces, and the remaining two and the removal of the others blew it away.

Kani's speed in using them eliminated that rooftop from the Odawara city.

Meanwhile, the fox named Yoshiaki enjoyed the chase.

The spears would sometimes catch up to her, but she would read the timing of their fall from the sky, and...

“...!”

With a “ko ko” from her throat, she would slide her body out of the way.

She would sometimes move as if lightly embracing the pillar of the falling spear, but each time...

“————”

Kani changed its trajectory. She would change the timing of 8 spears' ejection and storage and alter their trajectory.

The fox would move away but laugh in her throat once more.

The fox twirled at the leading edge of the roaring wave wreaking havoc on the city.

“How about this?”

She danced.

Kani saw *it*.

It was a dance. Just as a shrine maiden or entertainer would dance in a festival, Yoshiaki danced at the leading edge of the destruction Kani was causing.

She spun around as she ran, leaped with rhythmic steps, and used the fan at the end of her swinging arm.

...*My spear...!*

She hit it. What looked like a light attack with the fan provided an accent to the dance.

“...!”

A loud noise rang out and the spear danced. The cowering spear rotated in the air, but it did not hit any of the others. It dove into the cluster of spears like a geometric mobile.

“Wah!”

And it passed through to approach Kani.

The spear had been knocked back with what looked like a gentle rotation and throw, but it was definitely targeted at her as she ran.

She was ashamed to receive a counterattack from her own weapon, but...

*...How did she do that!?*

Kani controlled the attack trajectory and everything else. They were densely packed and there was no opening between one attack and the next. Or so she thought.

But her opponent had seen through the attack, stolen one of the weapons, and used it for a counterattack.

She could not call it impossible. After all, she had just seen it happen right in front of her.

It was possible to dodge, dance with, and find an opening in the attack she had thought was perfect.

*...She can do it!*

*Incredible*, thought Kani.

‘That’s incredible!’

Once she put it to words, it really did feel that way.

So she placed her hand on the approaching spear and stored it in the space behind her.

Now, what to do?

*...There’s still more I can do!*

She was not going to hold back. She had already been spared defeat. So...

“I will make myself a worthy opponent of this incredible person!”

Yoshiaki sensed a change in the atmosphere.

*...Oh? Has she started thinking?*

The spear movement had changed.

Before, they had stabbed diagonally down at her from above.

But now there was a slight downward swing included. Instead of stabbing,

they were slashing with the bottom of the tip.

That was troublesome.

With a straight-line stabbing motion, only a small force was needed to alter its trajectory. But with even a slight downwards swing added in, it would pull down on her if she touched it.

This was harder to interfere with.

“But it couldn’t hurt to do it once, right?”

*Foxes never play fair*, she thought with a self-deprecating laugh while striking the spear in her dance.

She made a swift strike to the top of the falling cowering spear’s tip to roll it forward before it hit the roof. That lowered her stance, but it did not obstruct her dance. In fact, it placed her behind the spear, making it harder for Kani to see her.

The spear flew.

The trick was to rotate it. The spear’s rotating motion would allow the other falling spears past it. That provided clearance to throw it, not just straight ahead, but above it and below it as well.

So that was what she did. And Yoshiaki noticed something beyond the spear she had hit and rotated.

“...Oh?”

Kani was gone.

Yoshiaki did not look to her surroundings.

Kani was somewhere. She had used the line of spears as a shield and moved elsewhere while the spears were launched.

So the rest was simple.

Yoshiaki needed to look straight down. The cloudy sky’s light fell on the dancing rooftop.



The shadows were faint but existent.

And above her own shadow image, she saw the spears and a faint silhouette that had jumped above that.

It was Kani.

She was not directly above Yoshiaki. She was jumping over Yoshiaki, but she had also launched her spears.

They surrounded the fox's shadow image so she could not escape.

The shadow image showed a cage of spears.

Kani had not taken her eyes off of Yoshiaki.

Even as she jumped over her, she turned her body to face her.

The 8 spears she released in the air were directed toward Yoshiaki in the center below them.

*...Go!*

She launched them.

The spears' positions were scattered. When looking at their shadows, they seemed to be spread out in a fan shape, but they were not actually lined up and were swung to the left and right.

If their trajectories matched, they were easy to read and there would be an opening, so Kani sent them down without matching them.

*"...!"*

She ejected them all toward the center.

The 8 spears glistened as vermilion stakes in the summer sunlight as they shot accurately toward the enemy.

They would hit. But just as she thought that...

*"You take this too seriously."*

She heard a bitterly smiling voice. And...

...Eh?

The fox had vanished. All of a sudden, Yoshiaki was no longer at the center of the spear tips.

*Impossible*, thought Kani before immediately correcting herself.

It had in fact happened in front of her.

The spears would meet atop the ridge of the roof and Yoshiaki had been at one point on the way there.

The falling spear tips had surrounded her, leaving no room for escape.

Except that was wrong.

“I am here.”

Kani was looking down, but she felt a soft tap on her forehead.

It was a fan. Its owner was right in front of her as she flew through the air. And it was undoubtedly...

“Yoshiaki-sama...!?”

She looked up and the fan pulled back.

The fox was beyond it.

Kani knew what had happened.

Yoshiaki had leaped up as the attacks had focused in on her from above.

Needless to say, the spears had been sent in from above.

But she had leaped along their descending path.

“Do you understand?”

Kani definitely heard Yoshiaki’s voice from behind the fan over her mouth.

“A concentrated attack will have gaps between the attacks at the starting point. ...So as long as you follow one of those attacks to the starting point, the concentrated attack is no more than a single attack. In other words...”

Yoshiaki stepped on the butt of one spear stabbed into the roof at the center

of the group.

It looked like a light step, but the other seven cowering spears were blown away.

As Kani started to land, three rotating spears passed her by and disappeared.

And just as she landed, something reached her.

“Do it like this.”

A giant spear tip filled her vision.

*...Is this...?*

It was the strike to the face she specialized in for an initial attack.

You sent an attack accurately into the center of your opponent’s vision.

People had difficulty seeing things in the very center of their vision. When looking forward, their right and left vision intersected directly in front of the bridge of their nose, causing the information to intersect and distort.

People had a subconscious fear of things there. Once you understood that, you only had to target the bridge of the nose from dead ahead. The trick was to lower the speed of the attack to drive home the image of the spear tip. Since Sasamura was ejected, it was ideal for that kind of initial attack. However...

“————”

Kani swung her head to the left to dodge it. And she grabbed ahold of the spear shaft as it passed her by. She used the momentum of the flying spear to move herself away from Yoshiaki.

But it did not work. Yoshiaki was attached to the butt end.

Kani was holding onto the shaft to fall back and Yoshiaki was holding onto the butt to leap forward, so their speeds were identical.

Kani did not even have time to think “eh!?”

“How about his?”

Yoshiaki knocked the spear butt upwards.

It looked like a light action, but Kani’s body rotated with the spear.

The tip stabbed into the roof and the recoil caused the spear to pitch forward and fly away.

Kani was launched into the sky with the spear.

*...Incredible!*

She was no match for Yoshiaki. No, that was the wrong way to put it.

This did not even reach the level of being a match for someone or not. It was better to say...

*...I can't reach her...!*

Her techniques were not even reaching Yoshiaki.

"Now," said the fox standing on the roof. "Kani Saizou. ...There is a certain story about you in the Testament, isn't there? When you were training in the spear under Houzouin, the more technique you learned, the more your skill fell. And when you asked Houzouin about it, he told you to be more single-minded."

The fox placed the fan over her mouth.

"Now, I hear you got three hits in on Houzouin. The last one was a joke, but what about the first two? Houzouin is well-known as a master spear user. In a way, the best techniques are taught at his school. So how did you get two hits in on him?"

"Well, um."

Kani thought back to that time as she landed.

Back then, her teacher had said it was about time and then he had faced her in combat. They had dueled in the large open-air dojo, the sky had been clear, the wind had been much like today, and the ground had been packed down by many feet. However...

"I don't really remember. I was so focused on just doing my best."

"Ko ko," laughed the fox. She tapped her chest. "Do not think you are a match for me. You are still just a young girl. But I doubt you will be discouraged either. So..."

So...

“Come at me while only ever thinking of doing your best.”

“Testament!”

“No.”

Right. That was the wrong thing to say. If she was going to respond now, there was only one thing to say.

“I will do my best!”

“What is your name?”

“I will do my best!”

“What is your favorite food?”

“I will do my best!”

“Are you making fun of me?”

“I will do my best!”

“Is that all you can say?”

“I will do my best!”

“I see.”

“I will do my best!”

“Then...”

“I will do my best!”

“...You are awfully persistent.”

“I will do my best!”

“Come.”

“I will do my best!”

Kani organized her thoughts and went.

The Reine des Garous focused her ears as she ate some venison with the bone in.

A long way down the road, she heard clashing metal to the northeast.

That had been there before, but...

*...It has changed.*

The sound was continuous, but not in an orderly row as before.

Instead of taking their turns, the sounds were intertwined while the high and low sounds rang separately. But this seemed to be the proper form for it all.

“It is balanced.”

“Oh? What is?”

“Testament.” The Reine des Garous grabbed another rice ball in both hands while listening to the distant sounds like they were the notes of a wind chime. “If you are self-absorbed in your own techniques, you will assume those techniques will have certain results on the battlefield, and your attacks will never surpass that one system. But if you become self-absorbed in your power, you will assume that power will always play out in the same way, and you will fail to see the next move in your attack. ...You need the good sense to balance the two such that you have the technique to create the next move and also the power to force that technique through.”

“How does Mitotsudaira-san manage there?”

“Her?”

The Reine des Garous thought about that while biting into the rice ball with her lips.

*...Hmm...*

“She still has a long way to go. There are things she lacks and she needs to retrain herself in some areas.”

“Oh, how reliable.”

She was offered a garnish of damp vegetables.

“These are fermented. Pickled foods go well with curry. There is still plenty more curry, so feel free to eat this along with it.”

“Thank you. But...”

The Reine des Garous focused her ears on the distant sounds.

There was one abnormality among them.

“I think they are getting help from a machine...but the series of attacks is not ending.”

Kani went all out in her battle against Yoshiaki.

“—————!”

Her feet were no longer kicking off the roof.

They were kicking off the spears she ejected into the air so that the force of the spears launched her.

“...!”

She would launch a spear, move away, and then use an ejected spear as footing to jump back to close range.

She would move left, right, up, and down.

She was like a ball bouncing through the air. She was knocked every which way by the rackets that briefly appeared. So she would eject another spear and forcibly kick off of it to fix her trajectory.

Someone ran lightly along the roof as the spears stabbed into it.

It was Yoshiaki.

The fox was dancing with two fans.

Auditory spells appeared around her. They played the music of drums, bells, flutes, and gongs as she danced.

Her light running steps responded to Kani’s all-out attacks.

“How about this?”

The fans hit the spears, deflected them, spun them around, and sent them back.

Each time, sparks flew, noise rang, and it all provided accompaniment for Yoshiaki.

However, a change occurred between the two of them.

Yoshiaki and Kani's dance and clash were accelerating.

Yoshiaki's twirling sliced through the wind and Kani's movements now included vertical and inverted movements.

"————"

The two musicians spun and moved through the Odawara city.

But there were gradual changes in a few areas.

Yoshiaki's fans began striking Kani's spears more often, making the impacts sound like percussion instruments.

It was not that Kani's attacks were being hit more often. She had started increasing her number of attacks.

"Oh?"

Yoshiaki raised her eyebrows in a smile.

"Are you willing to dance with a fox?"

Kani sped up.

"Ha."

Do your best.

Her body felt heavy. It felt like her body was not keeping up with her imagined self.

But do your best.

Always do your best.

Because she had yet to reach her limit. After all, she was still only 16. She would still grow taller. And her breasts would grow.

With every minute and every second, her limits were growing.

But what good was all that if she did not do her best right now?

No, not just now.



Her grandpa had said that life was one long lesson. He had clearly told her that in order to avoid the fact that he was playing shogi against her without properly explaining the rules.

And her mom had told her something while fixing her uniform's collar before she went to the attack on Mouri.

"Do your best."

She had replied with "I will" before correcting it to "testament".

Her dad had told her not to push herself too hard, but that was not a problem. If she had yet to reach her limit, she could not be pushing herself too hard.

She would grow throughout her life, so she could do her best throughout her life. So...

*...Do your best.*

She danced through the air, kicked off the spears, and moved more quickly than the ejected spear tips.

Do your best against this incredible person.

Do your best with what you have so you can face this incredible person who has spent years reaching this point.

*...Do your best.*

She took a breath.

*I'm not taking a breath to slack off. I'm taking a breath to do my best. With oxygen in my lungs, I can approach Yoshiaki-sama and her fans to...*

"...Do my best!"

She would do her best and bring back a good story to tell.

But if that story was only about Yoshiaki, her parents would find it entertaining, but afterwards they would ask her something: Did you really do everything you could?

*Testament. I'll do everything I can. I'll do it and return home with a smile. So...*

“Do your best...!”

Kani made a high-speed side flip as she touched Yoshiaki’s fan. She reached out her hand and touched it with her finger.

“ ... ”

She used her leaping speed to circle around the fox’s dance.

*Here she comes,* thought Yoshiaki with a smile in her heart.

Such a good girl. Children this honest were rare.

She must have been born and raised in an excellent family.

Her collar had been straight to begin with and it kept its crease even when it got out of place.

And her hair stayed together at her nape.

*...That’s right.*

Some good parents must have sent her out onto the world stage here. So...

“Do your best.”

Kani accelerated as if to comply. She charged into Yoshiaki’s dance as if launched by the ejected spears. Her movements were rough, but she nobly did her best to approach.

“You understand, don’t you?”

It was not about technique. Nor was it about power. Everyone had something that contained both.

Everyone had something, but few ever realized they had it.

For this girl, it was her persistence in doing her best.

What was it for Yoshiyasu? She seemed to have already found something, but asking about it would be crass. And...

*...Komahime.*

Yoshiaki did not think that girl had realized what she had. But...

“—————”

She had supported the crumbling floating city and left with her beloved.

Since she had given a cry of parting even with all that going on, it was best to trust in her.

That girl had found something to do and the method with which to do it. And in the end, she had not hesitated.

*...Hey.*

*Komahime*, thought Yoshiaki.

*Now that you have left, there are some children here who are struggling to find and obtain something, just like you did.*

*Is it a happy thing to see them, sometimes hold them close, and sometimes say goodbye?*

*...Do not worry.*

*Your mother is doing well. I am not alone. And even if I was, I could not just ignore these children.*

*This is a fox dance. A dance of the fox fire and shadow seen in festivals.*

*Komahime, the next time I remember you, it will not bring me sorrow.*

*You are one of my children. And right now, my children must...*

“Come.”

Yoshiaki danced as she spoke.

She spread her fans toward Kani and invited her to the dance.

Kani made her final acceleration.

She dove in close to Yoshiaki and did something with her spears.

*...Release cowlings!*

She separated the spear cowlings which provided attack pressurization and acceleration.

The plain spears in the center were launched from the cowl as if by a catapult.

This battle was focused on acceleration and this acceleration method was her last resort on that front. She used that attack to...

“...Do my best!”

Why was it she did not say she *had done* her best?

With that thought, Kani accelerated the spears while within arm’s reach of her enemy.

She sent them at her.

Kani felt the tactile feedback.

She had made 8 simultaneous attacks with 8 spears while jumping in and they had pierced Yoshiaki.

Except she saw something else entirely in front of her.

...*Eh!*?

Her eyes widened as Yoshiaki dealt with each of the spears.

Yoshiaki did not deal with all 8 spears at once.

A different Yoshiaki dealt with each spear.

“Is this so surprising? I am a nine-tailed fox, so I can create as many bodies as I have tails.”

8 of the 9 Yoshiakis intercepted a spear each.

They used opened fans that hit with swung trajectories.

The fans’ patterns glowed fox-yellow and that light drew a trail behind them. The foxes danced with ether light tails whipping behind them and they drew light in the empty air.

“The character for fox is written with the characters for melon and beast. A melon is a fruit. In other words, a curved thing.”

Something gouged into the air.

*...Is this...!?*

It was what Kani had seen at the start of the battle. The scale was smaller, but the power that had gouged into the city had just erupted before her eyes.

Eight arcing attacks tore spherical shapes out of the space along their path.

The spears, the cowlings, and even the air were eliminated with a great cry. It almost sounded like a fox's cry.

The spears and cowlings were devoured in an instant. And that included all eight of them.

Kani realized she had lost her weapons, but her body was still there in the air.

This was not over yet. So...

"Do your best...!"

She raised both arms and performed a tackle against Yoshiaki.

She sent herself forward in a body press directed at the center Yoshiaki who was untouched by the spears.

Yoshiaki moved in response. She spread her arms and bent her body.

"Caaaaaught yooooooooou!"

She embraced Kani in her arms.

As the arcs of light scattered in the air and fragments of cowlings and spears flew, Kani attempted to tear herself away from the fox who had caught her.

But when she bent back and raised her head...

*...Ah.*

She realized something.

Past Yoshiaki, she saw Odawara torn up and filled with holes.

*...I know where this is.*

It was the starting point of their battle. Once she realized that, Kani thought about her enemy's skill again.

*...Incredible.*

Fukushima had told her to view the flow of battle.

She had tried to do that while dueling Yoshiaki, but her enemy had been looking at things on a larger scale.

“Incredible...!” she tried to say. She really did try to.

But her body trembled and her strength left her.

“Ah...!”

Tears spilled from her eyes and she cried out.

She buried her face in Yoshiaki’s chest to hide her tears and she wept for no real reason.

Yoshiaki held her in her arms to support her back and shoulders and patted her on the back to soothe her.

“There, there. You did your best.”

“I...I...!”

She wanted to say something – convey something. But she could not put her thoughts to words.

“Were you afraid?”

She nodded. She had been afraid her best would not reach her opponent and Yoshiaki would be disappointed in her.

But Yoshiaki gave a “ko ko” from her throat.

“It’s okay.”

She looked down at Kani’s face.

There was a single red line on her right cheek.

“You did reach one of them on the right. But you were so surprised at the end that your aim shifted.”

So...

“After you rest, your best will be even better than before, won’t it?”

“...Testament!”

Kani hugged Yoshiaki back. She let out a tearful breath, got her breathing under control, and thought.

*...Mom, dad...*

She could tell them what she had done.

Confident that she had done her best against someone incredible, she entrusted herself to Yoshiaki's arms and chest.

In the relief of her relaxing tension, she breathed a long, deep breath.

Gin realized the sounds of fighting from the Odawara city had stopped.

Muneshige sat on the slope next to her and he was counting something on his fingers.

“Gin, how would you handle an octuple attack from close range?”

First of all, that question referred to an unthinkable situation. But Gin knew that someone in Odawara had made just such an attack, so she replied.

“You could handle it, Master Muneshige.”

“Eh?” said the Asama Shrine Representative as she turned around, but Gin decided to ignore her.

“Hm.” Muneshige nodded. “Judge. I could handle it?”

“Judge. I do not know what exactly you would do, but when I heard your question, I did not sense much of a threat in it. So you could handle it.”

After Gin smiled, she sensed a presence to her right.

She turned to find the Musashi Vice Chancellor doing squats with Tonbo Spare raised overhead.

“...What are you doing, Honda Futayo?”

“Eh? Gin-dono... You aren't familiar with these? They are known as squats.”

That one hit her hard.

*I must endure. The daughter of a warrior family must keep her cool. To use the Spanish, I must remain “calma”.*

She shut her eyes, breathed in, and cooled her heart. She counted to three, said “okay”, and opened her eyes. *Keep your presence of mind. This is the usual Tachibana Gin.* And when she faced forward...

“See, Gin-dono? By making sure your heels stay on the ground, you can give your entire leg a workout.”

“I am well aware...!”

She snapped back on reflex and the Musashi Vice Chancellor stood up.

“You knew, Gin-dono!? I should have known! An amateur like me shouldn’t act like she knows what she’s talking about, huh?”

“...And I have one piece of advice.” Gin raised her right prosthetic arm’s pointer finger. “...Your form can hurt your knees. You need to hold your hands against your legs. Do you understand?”

“Judge! ...Thanks for yet another warning, Gin-dono!”

When the girl laughed, Gin clung to Muneshige.

“Master Muneshige! Master Muneshige! Who was in the wrong here!? Was it me!?”

“Ha ha ha. Gin, no one did anything wrong there.”

She could hear the Chancellor’s sister and some others suppressing laughter, but...

*...I’m not that kind of character. I’m really not.*

But when she turned back toward Muneshige, she saw someone on the slope a short distance from the others.

It was the Vice President.

She was lying on the slope with her back to the others and she was playing with her anteater.

She moved slowly and lazily while speaking to the anteater.



“Nnn. So Mogami defeated Hashiba’s Kani, huh? But it’s all meaningless if we don’t defeat Houjou. Do you understand, Tsukinowa? ...Ha ha ha. You’re so cute.”

*...This development could cause trouble...*

Gin wondered if she should say something since she had noticed. Or would someone else deal with the girl? She looked back and saw everyone else averting their gaze. The one who “noticed it” was apparently in charge of dealing with it.

And the others were whispering among themselves.

“This is because things aren’t going her way...”

“She probably wishes she had started a war instead.”

“Yeah, peace is a lot more inconvenient than you would think.”

This situation was indeed a lot of trouble for Musashi. After all...

“Almost all of the Musashi and Mogami representatives have already fought.”

Gin realized that the Representative Committee Head was the only member of the Musashi forces in Odawara who could fight at the moment.

But that girl appeared to be heavily exhausted. Even if she did fight, the odds were good she would lose.

But all the others were in the mandatory hour-long break after a battle.

It would be very bad if the rest of the Houjou fighters fought during that hour.

*...Then the Musashi fighters would be unable to fight them.*

Then what should they do? That was a tricky question, but they were in trouble if they did not come up with something.

“Musashi Vice President.” Gin called out to the girl who needed to come up with something for Musashi. “It might be cloudy, but lying down exposes more of your body’s surface area to the sun, increasing the risk of heatstroke and dehydration. Shouldn’t you sit up?”

“Nnn.”

She gave a lazy groan in response.

*...At times like this, Master Muneshige would say “Okay, Gin!” and get up immediately...*

She appreciated that when he was asleep and it was time to put up the futon.

During a training camp for Tres España officers, Captain Takakane and the others had complained that Muneshige had far too much energy for the early morning, but it probably had something to do with how she used to target him in his sleep and attempted to stab him with her sword. The morning energy level had reduced a fair bit in recent times. On her part.

But she could not exactly stab the Musashi Vice President with a sword.

“...She isn’t getting up.”

“Gin-dono,” said Futayo. “If you want Masazumi to get up, you can lure her with food.”

That sounded awfully insulting.

But it was lunchtime, so maybe that was all it meant.

*...What can I use as bait?*

Musashi’s Princess carried over a daikon radish peeled to look like an artillery shell. She got down on one knee and held it up toward Gin.

“I beseech you to use this and spare her a worse fate.”

*That’s ridiculous. And what does that even mean, anyway?*

Gin decided the bait plan had failed.

*Fine then,* she sighed in her heart.

“Musashi Vice President, everyone is waiting for your instructions.”

“Nnn.”

Next to her, Musashi’s Princess repeatedly raised her arms a little bit in a “More! More! Cheer her up some more!” gesture. Gin wondered how she could understand the meaning so well. Perhaps the Princess’s gestures were just that

well done.

*...Yes, because her arms move so much.*

She wondered if hers could do the same, but she had never tried it.  
Regardless...

**Tachibana Wife:** “...But how am I supposed to cheer her up more than that?”

**Silver Wolf:** “Eh? That was all you had?”

**Flat Vassal:** “K-keep at it a little longer, Gin-san.”

**Sticky King:** “Indeed. I think you should stick to it some more!”

Since an expert on stickiness said so, Gin thought about how to stick to it.

“Listen, Musashi Vice President. I would rather not say this, but, well, everyone here needs your instructions right now. How should I put this? They are hopeless without you. I do not really care that much, but I think they need you with them. Of course, if you insist on continuing like this, that is fine too. I will respect your wishes. Yes, in other words...”

**Obscene:** “Sticking to it is pointless if you aren’t helping!”

**Tachibana Wife:** “I was starting to think the same thing.”

**Tachibana Husband:** “Gin! You are even more talented than I thought!”

**Tachibana Wife:** “Master Muneshige, you thought I did a good job?”

**Tachibana Husband:** “I did!”

**Gold Mar:** “...No, not at all. Listening to that was like being thrown out into the cold night.”

When she heard the 3rd Special Duty Officer’s comment, the Vice President slowly got up.

She pressed her hands against the slope to peel herself off of it.

“Naito...in the night...”

Her back shook a bit as she laughed.

“That’s pretty funny. Right...?”

**Uqui:** “Pleased with yourself, Naito?”

**Gold Mar:** “No, no, no, no, no, no. Let’s not ask stupid questions, Uqui.”

**Flat Vassal:** “But the Vice President got up!”

**Worshiper:** “In a way, I think Flatda-kun is the most troublesome character of all.”

“Hmm,” said Masazumi as she sat up.

She placed Tsukinowa on her shoulder, avoided looking at the others, placed her right elbow on her raised right knee, and looked to Odawara.

There did not seem to be any battles in Odawara right now. The initial phase was over and fighters were reporting back to their respective nations to confirm their plans for the battle.

Musashi needed to do that too, but...

“Asama, have we received any outside information?”

There was something she wanted to know.

“The situation in Paris. They should have already started their battle to flood Paris.”

“Sorry, I know we need to settle on a plan for Odawara, but I also want to hear about things at Paris.”

Below the cloudy sky southeast of Odawara, Terumoto wore a track suit and cooked some yakisoba at a festival stand. The encampment containing Pension Versailles’s white form could be seen behind her.

The divine radio next to the change counter provided information on Paris.

When she slid the volume control on its *signe cadre*, the lined-up students broke their ranks. They gestured each other over and formed a half-circle in front of Terumoto’s stand.

Those in the front got down on their knees and the middle group sat all the way down. Terumoto smiled bitterly at them all.

“I’ll make you some yakisoba, so stay in line! The first five people can take theirs once it’s ready!”

“Testament!” they replied as Mouri-01 poked her head out from the back of the next stand.

“Princess! I’ve made contact with Hexagone Française!”

“Okay, boys and girls! Let’s hear what they’re up to.”

She crossed her arms as the voice started playing.

The divine radio shook and played a broadcast from Ecole de Paris’s broadcast club. It was an Hexagone Française afternoon news program.

“Hello, everyone. Today’s ‘Armor-Piercing Room’ comes from the front line of the outer-edge assault unit which forms the very front line of Paris. Oh, dear. Look at all those shells flying in... Oh, my!”

The host continued in their idiosyncratic speech style.

“My, oh, my! The front line is about to begin a real clash...! They must be attempting to crush the enemy’s embankment points before the water comes rushing in,” explained the host. “Not bad. First up is downstream in the Seine. ... The first clash will likely occur there.”

# **Chapter 52: Suppressors of the Siege**

# 第五十二章

## 『包囲網の制圧者達』



違和感の正体は  
正常なるいつもへの  
挑戦を認める心  
配点 (平常心)

*This odd feeling*

*Is my acceptance of a challenge*

*To the usual way of things*

### **Point Allocation (Presence of Mind)**

The city of Paris was about 3km across and it was not yet submerged.

An embankment with more than twice the diameter of Paris had dammed up the Seine.

But the large area and the deep moat dug in advance were delaying the water.

The water slowly filled the moat and downstream area like a water clock, but groups were also gathered both inside and outside of Paris to glare at each other.

On the inside were the Hexagone Française warriors, primarily their mid-level god of war defense unit.

On the outside were the M.H.R.R. warriors, primarily their mobile shell unit.

They were each facing each other from formations in front of their bases.

The Hexagone Française groups were in front of each of Paris's gates.

The M.H.R.R. groups were in front of the divine protection facilities for reinforcing the seams in the embankment.

The embankment was generally made by combining armor panels and filling in the gaps between them, so they did not have much in the way of earthen fortifications. The reinforcement divine protection facilities reinforced the embankment by increasing its bonds and holding it in place.

They were using light transport ships for the facilities. The transport ships that had been abandoned after transporting the materials were at least Dragon-class, but these were generally Kraken-class.

The facilities contained rows of Holy Spell boards.



The Holy Spells provided combined “distribution” and “earth harvest” divine protections. As long as they were given power, the embankment would be treated as the earth, so it would stay together and push back the water.

Meanwhile, the Hexagone Française formations were mostly a reaction to the M.H.R.R. ones.

“If they’re just going to flood us, they don’t really have a reason to enter Paris, do they?”

One member of the leading warrior unit said that and the others nodded in agreement.

“At Magdeburg, it had to be a ‘sack’, but not so here.”

“Of course, we’re prepared to fight back if they do charge in.”

They had learned a lesson at Magdeburg and it informed their strategy here.

In other words...

“There are a number of options...but if we destroy those reinforcement divine protection facilities, the embankment will fall apart.”

“Once they have no way of actually flooding Paris, Hashiba has failed.”

“So that’s what we need to do first.”

And...

“Then we can take revenge from the dry ground.”

They had lost something at Magdeburg.

They all spoke to themselves without anyone starting it.

“Vive La Anne.”

Their voices were one, but they did not yell.

“The age of advocating loss has ended.”

“Now is the time for vengeance.”

“To show that we exist in the next age created by that small divine girl, we must carry her loss in our hearts, and...”

They all opened their mouths and raised their right hands toward the figure standing atop Paris's wall.

It was the Roi-Soleil. He turned toward them all.

"Let us begin with a word for the previous Chancellor."

That word being...

"Amen."

They all crossed themselves in agreement.

Below the summer sun, the primarily red musket unit and the primarily white god of war unit stepped forward.

Amen. Their footsteps and mechanical noises joined their voices, but they all only said it once.

And once someone had said it, they would increase their forward speed.

"Let's go."

"Ohh," they roared.

"The conqueror's path begins here...!"

*The battle is beginning*, thought Kiyomasa as she stood on the front line.

She was in front of the northern reinforcement divine protection facility.

The largest of those facilities were in the four cardinal directions. The smaller four were in between those. There were a total of eight, but the smaller ones were only divine protection relay points for the larger ones. As long as the larger ones did not fall, the divine protections would not be stopped.

M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda were positioned on the lines between Paris and those larger facilities.

Those four largescale front lines moved out from Paris in each direction.

Kiyomasa was on the northern one of those. The larger facility there was a black structure made from a 50m transport ship. An M.H.R.R. warrior unit and some low-altitude aerial ships were positioned in front of it.

That northern battlefield had somewhat more enemies than elsewhere.

That was because the Seine flowed from east to west through Paris.

The north was downstream, but it did not border the Seine. The northern area required the water to flood the whole area, so it bought some time for Hexagone Française before the flooding occurred.

Hexagone Française hoped they could destroy the larger divine protection facility. And even if they did not...

“They hope to destroy the downstream western one.”

Kiyomasa looked west as the enemy approached.

There was a large enemy force there.

That force was nearly twice the size of the one approaching here. And waiting for them...

**Kiyo-Massive:** “Hachisuka-sama, how are things there?”

**6:** “Quiet.”

*Eh?* thought Kiyomasa about what Hachisuka had said.

*...She isn't telling me to be quiet, is she?*

But the other girl must have thought she had said too little.

**6:** “They’re going to start with artillery fire.”

**Kiyo-Massive:** “Oh, you’re right. That is what this strange ‘pause’ means.”

**Llaf:** “Why do thou say that?”

**Kuro-Take:** “Because it’s so exciting!”

**6:** “This is serious!!”

*Well, some silliness should be fine. After all...*

“Please calm down, everyone! We have Takenaka’s Testamenta Arma, so we can survive it once as long as we have courage!”

“Testament...!”

They all nodded and prepared for the incoming attack. And just then...

**Kuro-Take:** “Oh, I do have one thing to confess.”

□□凸: “Is it something important?”

“Testament,” confirmed Takenaka.

**Kuro-Take:** “I’m actually pretty far away from the battlefield, so my Testamenta Arma’s power won’t reach you. ...I didn’t tell anyone until now, though.”

“Waaahhh!”

Everyone exchanged a glance and began shouting.

“I wore lighter armor because I was counting on that!”

“I wore something that showed off my bodylines because I thought I could take that one hit!”

“Does it only work if we’re in range of her ero ero-ing!?”

**Kuro-Take:** “Katagiri-kun’s southern area is probably just barely in range... Since you’re out there, could you go test it real quick, Katagiri-kun?”

□□凸: “I-I would really rather not be the subject of such an inexact test!”

**Kiyo-Massive:** “Also, excuse me, but why didn’t you tell us in advance?”

**Kuro-Take:** “Well, if I told you in advance, you’d be more hesitant and it wouldn’t have that ‘high damage’ feeling.”

**6:** “Don’t base your decisions on how things feel...!”

Just as Hachisuka yelled at her, several small lights appeared atop the wall around Paris.

*...Artillery!*

And when everyone saw that...

“Waaahhh!”

Takenaka’s revelation had caused far too much psychological high damage.

But given the distance, Kiyomasa figured they had about 10 seconds until the

shells hit. And...

“...They can’t aim properly from this distance!”

She called out to calm the others and several *lernen figurs* appeared around them. The light warships floating in the sky behind them had predicted the impact points for the enemy shells and sent warnings.

They of course fired their own artillery.

The enemy front line had entered within effective targeting range of the light warships that had sent the warnings.

The enemy was on the move, so Kiyomasa spoke.

“Everyone...! Make your preparations just like we trained!”

She thrust Caledfwlch into the air in front of her and took a fighting stance. She faced the enemy’s cannon blasts.

“We will return fire from here!”

Several impacts occurred in an instant.

These were physical shells with long-range acceleration divine protections. They flew in a parabolic arc to reach the M.H.R.R. defensive formation.

They knew where the shells would fall thanks to the warship’s calculations and the warriors evacuated from those positions. It was like the shells were splitting their ranks in a reverse fan shape. That was because the shells could slide diagonally when they collided with the ground.

But the evacuation was not going well near the center of the formation.

Mobile shells were fast once they got moving, but they had trouble with immediate speed and small movements. These problems were exacerbated by how closely they were packed together, so the *lernen figurs* floating overhead cycled through the following messages: “You’re probably in danger here.” → “You’re in a lot of danger here.” → “Aren’t you going to dodge?”

“Th-those bastards on the ship aren’t taking this seriously!”

“Sorry...” said the *lernen figur*.

“Don’t apologize! Do something!”

“Here they are,” it said.

Everyone shouted and looked to the one person directly below that *lernen figur*. And...

“Do something about this!”

“Don’t ask the impossible! I’m ducking, so whoever’s behind me can mess with it!”

The people on his left and right silently stuck their arms under his arms so he could not duck. He was now suspended from the ground a bit, so he kicked his feet around.

“Stop thiiiiiiiiiiiiis!”

“Everyone, avert your gaze!”

All of the mobile shells gave that command, but then some figures flew by overhead.

They wore P.A. Oda summer uniforms. Their light spell armor looked like gym clothes and they ran above the mobile shell unit to reach the position in the air above the hit location.

They nimbly kicked off of shoulders and raised spears to reach that estimated location.

Those sprinters carried something like a flag. It had a long, 5m pole and a cloth with an emblem sewn into it.

The emblem was of wind, clouds, and flowing light. The leading member of that group unfurled it and leaped.

“Wind God Cheering Flag...! Let’s go with anti-artillery mode!”

With that, he lightly spun the unfurled flag around in the air.

That single motion transformed it into a funnel shape. And they all spun themselves around in the air.

“There...!”

He threw the bottom of the flagpole into the ground like it was a javelin.

It pierced in and the bottom of the funnel dug into the ground despite being made of cloth.

Immediately after, the shell flew right into the flag funnel.

It hit. Its power slammed into the ground at the bottom of the flag cylinder and the explosive blast erupted upwards. However...

“We did it!”

The entire blast was sent into the sky.

That was thanks to the wind buffering on the inside of the flag and the divine protection given to an extremely small area of land by stabbing into it.

The ground was hardened at the precise point of impact with a radius of only a few dozen centimeters. The shell’s shockwave was then sent into the sky by the flag funnel.

The trick was to not seal off the blast altogether. The flag was forcefully pushed open from within, but by then, the blast had already entered the sky and the flag funnel had turned it into a note played on a giant flute.

It sounded like bursting or tearing cloth, but the short flag fluttered.

The inside bore the 5/3 paulownia of Hashiba’s crest. Even as it tore, it made its presence known in the wind.

“Ohh...!”

The front line raised their voices at having been protected from the shell. And...

“The next shells are incoming!”

They knew that. But none of them stepped forward. They spread out a bit on either side to make evasion and buffering with additional flags easier.

“Bring on the first real attack...!”

Just as they raised their spears in the air and shouted that, something arrived.

The black-bodied Terrestrial Dragons brought by Bernard flew in.

Four dragons flew in.

And each one flew toward one of the four reinforcement divine protection facilities and the enemy formation there.

Two remained behind to protect Paris while the others made a swift attack.

In response, Kiyomasa's northern group fell back and defended at the same time. They opened a space for a falling dragon and prepared an attack to quickly surround the dragon once it did land. That was their strategy.

To the west, Hachisuka fell back while opening Genbu's defense barrier. She and the others around her created a half arc to open space for the dragon's fall.

Fukushima and Katagiri had their units run forward to open space behind them.

The dragons dropped down a moment later, but they landed in different locations.

"...Ohh!"

The dragons used their wings just before landing to hover.

The giant beasts' wings instantly gathered air below them. As a result, their hovering bodies gained a brief but gentle glide before colliding with something.

The dragons tackled the central ship of the warships floating at low altitude behind the Hashiba warriors.

The sound of impact rang out.

The sound of metal parts and frames being destroyed was a lot like shattering glass.

These were small for warships. The galleys were only about 200 meters and they were hit in the center by something half their mass.

The warships had their port sides pointed toward Paris.



The left-side armor was pushed and bent in by the great surface of the dragon's body. Because they pushed in at the frame all at once, an imprint of the dragon's full body formed on the port side, but the bending was much more scattered on the starboard side.

The dragon's imprint did not pass straight through the inside of the warship to reach the starboard side. If anything, the bending spread out in a curve, drawing pin-like curves in the frame that jutted out on the starboard side.

The piercing sound reverberated through the ship and the broken frames burst out the starboard side.

The starboard side swelled out and the bolts holding the armor in place burst off.

The destruction was all brought on by transformation.

The frames were destroyed with groaning and creaking. The light popping of the bolts sounded loud in the blowing wind.

The warships floated in the air as if to peel themselves away from the dragons.

The impact and virtual ocean flew, producing a white mist in the air.

Then the internal power systems burst. The ether fuel sent glowing smoke into the air and the spell gunpowder and shells were ignited within the compressed cannons on the port side.

They exploded.

But even that was ruled by the bending and crushing on the port side. The explosive flames and shockwave did not leave from the port side. They were instead pushed through the inside and out through the lost starboard side.

“—————”

The warships split open and burned from the bent, widened, and stretched starboard side.

Intermittent explosions and an all-encompassing shockwave sent the internal frames spewing out like javelins. The explosions destroyed the entirety of the warships and tore apart their 200m forms like tearing apart a fruit.

All that remained were the dragons flying higher in the explosive blast.

Their dark red armored bodies spread their wings and looked down upon the scattering warships.

“This is not good.”

A voice in Paris made that judgment of the aerial events.

It was Bernard who was keeping tabs on the situation from atop the southern wall. His bestial eyes were looking to the western sky.

“Not good at all.”

“What isn’t?” responded Armand who was using a telescope spell next to him.

The male *Belle de Marionnette* confirmed the model of warship that had been sunk.

“The greatest threat to the dragons is warship-class artillery, so the enemy’s command warships were sunk first. It was a decent decision. From here, they just have to crush the surface unit below. ...This caught the enemy off guard because they were expecting the weaker surface unit to be targeted. Wasn’t that the plan?”

“The enemy understood the threat we posed.”

So...

“It is too late.”

When Bernard said that, Armand raised his voice.

He was looking to the western sky where a warship was sinking.

“...The ships on either side are moving?”

The attacking dragons sensed a shadow.

The two enemy light warships behind them on the left and right were circling around.

It had looked like they were taking evasive action in response to the dragons' attack, but...

*...What?*

*Why aren't they firing?* wondered one dragon.

They soon had the answer.

It began with a light. And it came from below rather than the left or right.

The fallen warship that should have simply crashed into the surface was emitting a light.

*"...!?"*

The dragon did not even have time to cry out. In an instant, the warship below and the warships on either side erupted as an explosive blast.

This was the result of explosion spells. It was a large depth charge blast using warships.

*"Yesssss! High Damage, High Return! I read this one correctly!"*

Far south of Paris, Takenaka's voice rang out atop the separated Azuchi and transport ships.

Giant flame flowers were blossoming in the sky around Paris. The noise had yet to reach them.

But they had their results.

*"12 ships for 4 dragons. There are three ships remaining in each direction. Not a bad exchange for the starting move. ...The damage wasn't that high since we still have plenty of ships, but bringing them down to only two dragons was a decent return."*

So...

*"If we keep at it, I see victory in our future."*

Kiyomasa and the others got down on the battlefield.

They could see four massive explosions in the sky.

There was flame, smoke, and blade-like shockwaves spreading outwards from those.

And beyond that all-destroying blast...

“Everyone, defend...!”

An electrical discharge caused by atmospheric buffering swept across the ground like lightning.

The air was instantaneously fried and a metallic scent hung over the battlefield.

But beyond the metal fragments and scorched wreckage falling from the sky, the fried and broken dragons were falling from the pale blue sky.

“Ohh...!”

Far behind, the dragons’ great weight crashed into the land beyond the embankment rather than on the embankment itself.

A tremor raced out, the rumbling of the earth reached the M.H.R.R. warriors, and the shockwave in the sky finally reached them as well. However...

“The flag...!”

The defense flag stabbed into the earth revealed its true power here.

The flag bearing Hashiba’s emblem fluttered in response to the violent pressure from the sky and it adjusted that crushing power. The flag tore and ether light danced in the wind. But...

“Everyone, stand...!”

On Kiyomasa’s shouted instruction, everyone stood up.

They prepared for battle once more. They faced the approaching Hexagone Française front line.

They all faced the enemy and opened their mouths.

“We will open the way for no one...!”

“Testament, they too are doing well.”

The Roi-Soleil spoke from Paris’s wall when he heard the distant enemy’s determination to stay put.

On that summer afternoon, the heated wind arrived from the north, west, and east. The wind carried an iron scent, but it hit the defense barrier surrounding Paris and could not enter the city.

That roaring airflow ascended along the defense barrier and was hit by another rising wind when it attempted to descend.

The different wind sounds combined in a creaking and tearing while the Roi-Soleil continued.

“Bernard. What value was there in exchanging half our Terrestrial Dragons for 12 of the enemy’s light warships? At the very least, this has eliminated one of our tactics.”

“Testament, our attack halved the enemy’s aerial forces.” Bernard nodded when the Terrestrial Dragon guarding the west turned back toward him. “If we hold back the threat from the sky, we will win. That attack was valuable. ...Even if those were light warships, crushing three enemy ships is no easy task even for a large Terrestrial Dragon. The amount of loss is reasonable.”

“I’m glad to hear you say that,” said the eastern Terrestrial Dragon as he crouched down and picked up something that had fallen to the ground.

It was smaller than a dragon’s claw, but it was bent at a sharp angle.

“We were studying up on these things, but this is anti-warship, isn’t it?”

“Testament,” confirmed Armand. “It uses black steel on the tip. Hashiba special-orders these shells since they more or less control Bizen. They remain as hard as they look, so they can pierce warship armor at close range even when fired by the small cannons of a light warship.”

With a “here”, the dragon tossed the shell to Armand, but it was deflected by an invisible wall before reaching him. Henri responded by holding out her right hand.

She ejected one of the red blades her *Lourd de Marionnette* wielded.

It was reinforced and 8 meters long. The blade was synced with Henri's movements, so it caught the shell on its side and threw it to Armand.

"So how hard is it?"

"Testament, wait just a moment."

Armand caught the 60cm shell in one hand.

While Bernard and the others watched on, he touched the shell with his hand. Henri turned toward him.

"Well, Armand?"

"Testament. I know one thing now: there is something wrong with anyone who thinks you can figure everything out just by touching it."

"You know something else too, don't you?" Henri glared at him. "If you don't give me a serious answer this time, I will make sure you take responsibility."

The Roi-Soleil smiled a bit at that.

"Anyway, what do you think would happen if one of these flew in here, Armand?"

"...This is not meant to be fired at people."

"Are dragons people, Armand?"

"Hexagone Française is not as bad as England, but we're still pretty lax about those definitions." He looked to the Terrestrial Dragons. "The Terrestrial Dragons decided it was better to crush the warships before the surface units because the enemy was firing these toward Paris. ...If they took concentrated fire from these while crushing the surface unit, not even a Terrestrial Dragon would escape unscathed."

"Exactly," said one of the Terrestrial Dragons. "And when we did that, we were hit in return."

"In that case." The Roi-Soleil shrugged. "What will you have the dragons do now, Bernard?"

On the Azuchi Castle's bow deck, Takenaka viewed some *lernen figurs* in the

shade of a parasol held by an automaton.

They displayed the flow of battle based on Three Thousand Worlds' calculations. Both sides' movements had been narrowed down by those calculations in order to list a few optimal actions and a few inconvenient actions. However...

"Ugh. They've stopped moving."

She moved her hand to bring the right two *lernen figurs* in front of her.

"How boring. I want things to go more kaboom, y'know?"

**6:** "Explain yourself before complaining."

**Kuro-Take:** "Oh, testament! Right now, the Paris dragons are advancing."

**6:** "I can see that."

"Yes, yes, yes," said Takenaka while opening a different *lernen figur*. It was tagged "troublesome" and it displayed the dragons' location.

**Kuro-Take:** "But they've moved about 2 kilometers forward."

□□☒: "We can stop that with artillery fire from above, right?"

**Llaf:** "No. They are trying to draw our fire."

□□☒: "What do you mean?"

"Well – you – see," said Takenaka while opening a diagram showing the battlefield from the side. It showed the distance between the Hexagone Française forces whose advance had been stopped and the dragons behind them.

**Kuro-Take:** "I would honestly rather wear down their ground forces more than their dragons. So I want to fire the warships' cannons down at those ground forces as much as possible."

**Kiyo-Massive:** "But with the dragons behind them, we have to deter the dragons, right? And since firing on them requires aiming the cannons upwards, we cannot fire on the ground unit with the dragons so close. It is quite troublesome."

□□☒: "Testament. ...So that's it. But in that case, why not focus all our

artillery fire on the dragons?”

**Kuro-Take:** “Well, the thing about that is, they’re only just barely in range of the light warships, so the shell speed starts to drop... That means the ballistic path drops too, so with those big things, they only have to position their armor right and the attack is meaningless. We would normally use ether cannons, but we’re using all of our ether fuel on the reinforcement divine protections... What to do, what to do.”

*I don’t really have a choice,* decided Takenaka as she gave an order.

“Move the southern light warships forward. We will move 3 kilometers in and fire on Paris. We need to remind the dragons of how important Paris is. I will give further orders while we watch the flooding of Paris, so be prepared for whatever that might mean.”

**6:** “Hey, quit lecturing.”

“No, no,” said Takenaka.

**Kuro-Take:** “It’s looking like this is going to get somewhat annoying soon, so we need to make some changes.”

“So it still isn’t clear who’s going to win there, huh?”

Masazumi crossed her arms as she viewed the sign frames Asama and Mitotsudaira sent her.

Asama’s came via IZUMO and Mitotsudaira’s supplied the information automatically acquired with the Reine des Garous’s divine transmission divine protection.

Everyone was discussing the contents of the sign frames those two had passed around.

Even the idiot was nodding while he listened to Mitotsudaira’s explanation of the battlefield with Horizon by his side and his sister and Asama behind him.

Meanwhile, Neshinbara scratched his head.

“It looks like Hashiba wasn’t able to speed up the battle and Hexagone



Française is trying to stretch out the fighting time as much as they can.”

“Can you explain that in a simple fashion?”

“Wait, Crossdressing Honda-kun. Are you implying I normally explain things in a confusing or roundabout fashion? I always work to make my explanations as simple as possible, but you seem to be saying I include some kind of unnecessary preamble.”

“You just answered your own question.”

“Judge.” Mitotsudaira raised her right forearm. “Hexagone Française has a god of war unit and a nonhuman unit, but they have not sent them out to end this. ...Meanwhile, Hashiba had prepared an immediate counterattack for the attacking dragons. Simply put, Hexagone Française is using delaying tactics and Hashiba is making immediate counterattacks.”

The people gathered near Neshinbara moved to Mitotsudaira instead.

“Ah, h-have all of you forgotten who your strategist is...!?”

“Master Muneshige, I have recently started to think that insisting on going by your title may be a disgraceful thing.”

“Gin, that kind of insistence is an important thing. There is pride behind it. Pride in the people who gave you that title and continue to support you. ...But you cannot cling to it and abuse your authority.”

“You heard them, Neshinbara.”

Hearing that, Neshinbara struck a pose and pointed at Mitotsudaira.

“I challenge you, Mitotsudaira-kun!”

“To a physical fight?”

“T-to a quiz battle! Let’s not be so violent! ...How about history for the subject!? Oh, I know! Famous military commanders and daimyos would be perfect!”

“That’s just dirty!” shouted everyone.

Meanwhile, Horizon raised her right hand.

“Okay, time for the first question. This one is from the age after Matsudaira

takes over the Far East. ...What was the favorite food of the Hitachi Province's second substitute feudal lord?"

"Eh?"

Neshinbara's head swung forward and Horizon raised her left hand as well.

"It is not ramen."

"W-well, no, it wouldn't be!"

While Neshinbara said that, Mitotsudaira tilted her head and mimed pressing a button. And...

"...Salmon."

After a beat, Horizon raised her right thumb.

"That is correct, Mitotsudaira-sama! And with that, Neshinbara-sama's explanation right goes to Mitotsudaira-sama!"

"W-wait! How did you know that, Mitotsudaira-kun!?"

"Judge." Mitotsudaira lowered her shoulders and immediately answered. "Because the Hitachi Province's second substitute feudal lord is the source of my inherited name: Mito Mitsukuni."

"No fair...!"

"Your subject choice wasn't fair either!"

After everyone yelled at him, Mitotsudaira sighed.

"Why do you think I allowed Horizon to give you a hint?"

Horizon nodded twice at that.

"When I looked into it, I found that Mitotsudaira's name source, Koumon, ate a wide variety of things."

"P-please use more than just that name, Horizon!"<sup>[4]</sup>

*But it was his name,* thought Masazumi.

Regardless, Mitotsudaira had been given the right to explain. So...

"That speeds things up. So what do you think Hexagone Française and

Hashiba will do now?"

"Judge," replied Mitotsudaira while placing a hand on her chest.

Even if she was from Hexagone Française, she did not know much more than the others here. Her only advantage came from her habit of following the local news from there. But still...

*...Since I see those things periodically, I understand how they "fit together".*

So she thought about Hexagone Française's actions and Paris's situation. And...

"I doubt Hexagone Française will take any active action against Hashiba until the Siege of Odawara has ended here and the Kantou Liberation is on the horizon."

"Judge," said someone while raising their hand. It was Adele and she tilted her head. "But the flooding will continue while they sit there, won't it? Hashiba has said it will count as Hexagone Française's Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle if the flooding is complete, right?"

"Judge. If that happens, Hashiba will likely withdraw immediately and head here. ...But I think Hexagone Française has a way of buying time so that doesn't happen. There is no other way of explaining their inaction here."

Mitotsudaira opened an image.

It was a little too old to call "current". The Hexagone Française divine transmission newspaper was from about a week ago.

It showed a hand-drawn image of Paris within a green field of wheat. The article said the rebuilding of the walls was complete and they were fortifying their defenses.

*...Did they set something up in there?*

She did not know the answer, but...

"The previous dragon attack was likely meant to see what Hashiba has prepared. And I expect it was as successful as they could have hoped. Because it

told Hashiba that Hexagone Française needs to buy time to defend themselves. But at the same time...”

Yes.

“Hashiba must be confused as to why Hexagone Française has stopped moving. ...Hashiba must have assumed Hexagone Française would be forced to act to avoid the flooding.”

That Hexagone Française had started waiting was both convenient and inconvenient for Hashiba. If they were looking at it as convenient...

*...Waiting allows Paris to sink into the water.*

But if they were looking at it as inconvenient...

*...They must want to end the flooding of Paris early so they can intervene in the Kantou Liberation.*

What would they do?

Mitotsudaira thought about it and reached a conclusion.

“Sitting and thinking will not help them. Hashiba should be the next to act and I think we should focus on Odawara until that happens.”

“Judge,” agreed Masazumi.

Mitotsudaira smiled and asked a question of that Vice President whose passion had declined while playing with her anteater earlier.

“Have you recovered, Masazumi?”

“Judge. There’s still so much to do.” She stood up and swung her right hand. “Most of the national representatives are resting right now, so we need to take action during that time! ...Begin the transformed international negotiations!”

Date Narumi liked buckwheat.

She thought normal wheat was pretty good too, but buckwheat seemed quicker to her.

Buckwheat grew in cold regions, so it was a useful plant for Date.

*...Buckwheat dumplings are good, but the buckwheat noodles are popular here.*

Sake and soba was a good combination.

She was eating some soba at an Odawara café during the break time. She was using a four-seat table on her own, but that was merely a precaution.

*...At a counter seat, I could only dodge backwards if something happened.*

The café's entrance was on the left, so she wanted to avoid only being able to move backwards.

At the four-seat table, she sat facing the entrance so she could dodge to the left or right or use the table as a shield.

This might be a break, but you could never know what might happen. Hence the precaution. And...

“———”

Once she had her safety secured, she ate and drank.

Odawara sake was weak going down, but its clear flavor loosened and heated the inside of her cheeks.

Date sake was strong going down and would make you forget all about the day's weariness, but she felt like this sake reminded you of what happened during the day.

And right now, she was reminded of the previous battle.

Win or lose, memories of fighting were etched into her heart.

This battle was no exception. Remnants of that fighting feeling remained in the pit of her stomach.

She had honestly never really spoken with the Treasurer and had never really actively looked at him either.

But after being defeated so utterly, she had to wonder...

“...Why did that Treasurer even bother showing up?”

It was a mystery.

Class 3-Plum contained a lot of craz-...odd people, so they would sometimes suddenly join in on a whim. But this was a battle with international rights on the line, so couldn't they have chosen a representative who left more of an impact? ...No, he had left an impact. Just not a positive one.

She knew he had fought Tres España's Vice Chancellor during the Armada Battle.

But there was a clear difference between the records of that fight and what had just happened here.

*...Money.*

In the records, he had used money like crazy.

Just now, he had fought with only a few dozen thousand.

*...With a limit like that, you would think he's a servant father.*

He may have been hoping to make money by winning in a single decisive blow.

"If so..."

She did not feel bad about what she had done.

She was the Date Representative. Even if she had left Date, there was no need to worry about Musashi when she had such a clear position. She knew how hard Date worked to survive in that northern land.

She reached for the sake bottle and found it was empty.

"Another decanter. ...You, automaton."

"You mean meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!?"

*...This is certainly a...memorable café.*

And as she tried to figure out what that was about...

"Oh, what's this? Date's Vice Chancellor is here?"

A familiar face walked in the front entrance.

Narumi turned diagonally in her seat on reflex, but she had already identified the person from their voice.

“Mogami Yoshiaki.”

## **Chapter 53: Iron Woman at the Bar**



## 第五十三章

### 『酒処の鉄女』



どうしたものかしら  
何故か上の空で  
別のことを思ってる  
配点 (居場所)

*What is with me?*

*Why is my mind wandering*

*Onto other topics?*

### **Point Allocation (Home)**

Narumi watched silently as Yoshiaki sat across from her.

“Hey, automaton over there. I’ll have some barley tea and *tokoroten*.”

“You mean meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!?”

*And who are you? Oh, right. Houjou Ujiteru.*

“Yes, yes.” Yoshiaki nodded and pointed back toward the front entrance.

“Take some slightly salted ice water to the girl sleeping out front. Also add some mandarin orange flavor.”

“...I hear you defeated Hashiba’s Kani.”

“What kind of woman starts a discussion with combat?”

Yoshiaki sounded exasperated and did not seem to have even broken a sweat.

But she did laugh quietly. It was a “ko ko” from her throat.

“You smell more like a woman now, Narumi.”

“And what do you mean by that?”

Just as Narumi asked that, the fox’s fan touched her left shoulder from the outside.

As the fan pushed lightly inward on Narumi’s shoulder, Yoshiaki lifted it up and spoke.

“It looks like there is someone there next to you.”

“Are you hallucinating now?”

“I will never have a chance to do that. ...I do have a lot of children, though.”

It took Narumi a few seconds to realize what that meant. But once she did, she felt something settle down in her heart.

“Does that seem like a happy thing because I am not directly involved?”

“I am old enough to find it cute when children push their limits.”

“I see,” said Narumi while taking a sip of sake. “How do you find it when ‘others’ push their limits?”

“Ohh, how scary.”

Hearing that, Narumi slightly shifted her head to the right.

Something passed vertically by to the left of her face.

It was the fan that Yoshiaki had suddenly lowered.

After being dodged, Yoshiaki followed the movement of her hand with her angular eyes.

“...Ohh, how scary. What kind of woman can avoid a fox’s tricks?”

“Did you think mere tricks could affect a dragon?”

“I see,” said the fox this time. “A dragon drinking sake, hm?”

“I can’t let the children drink it.”

“Agreed,” said Yoshiaki before speaking to the counter. “I will have three bottles of sake.”

“What about the barley teeeeeeeeeaaaaaa!?! I feel bad for the barleyyyyyyyyyyyyy!”

“I will take that too.”

“Never mind theeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeen!”

*What a noisy café.* Narumi asked a question after taking a breath.

“You have something to say to me, don’t you?”

“Testament. Because you do not seem like much of a politician. ....You can call back home before finishing the sake and taking a break.”

“Huh?”

Narumi frowned as two sign frames appeared before her eyes, one on the right and one on the left.

The right one was from Date.

“Hiii! It’s your friend Kojuurou-kun!”

Narumi tried to ignore him, but the sign frame had some setting or another active and it stayed in front of her eyes even as she tried to avert her gaze.

“Surprised!? Were you surprised!? You were, weren’t you? Oh, c’mon! Give me some kind of reaction! Oh, I get it! You hate me, don’t you!? Well, I hate you too, so we are parallel. The pair of carriage wheel tracks continues forever in the same direction, but your power of hatred is way stronger than mine, so I’m kinda screwed, aren’t I!? Can I come off the axle!? I can, can’t I!? Wow, that glare! Don’t look at me like I’m the bug you found in the flower pot when you were enjoying looking after the flowers! Bugs exist for a reason too, you know!? Doesn’t change that they’re bugs, though!”

“You’ve gotten pretty annoying since I left...”

“Huh!? So I wasn’t annoying when you were here!? Was I cute? So that’s it! But it’s too late telling me that now! I won’t strip for you! Got that!? Only one piece of clothing! Okay, fine! It would be imbalanced if I removed a piece from the top without also removing piece from the bottom! Now, tell me why I was so not annoying! It’s cause I was cute, right!?”

“Because when I was there, I could physically silence you.”

“Wh-why are you so cement-like with us even after leaving!? Aren’t you feeling homesick and spending every evening worrying over whether you should send a divine mail!? Something like, ‘Kojuurou, if you make too much noise, I’ll have you fed to a sea lion’! But I prefer seals! I mean, it would sound like I was being sealed away!”

He would not shut up.

Yoshiaki was laughing across the table, but Narumi looked to the sign frame on her left.

The illuminated frame was labeled “Emergency Issue” and it displayed...

“Vice President?”

It was Musashi's Vice President.

The girl ignored the Musashi Princess who was beginning to peel a melon behind her.

"Listen, Date Narumi. As Musashi's representative, I have something to discuss with you as Date's representative."

"What is it?"

"Is there any way we could cancel out your victory over Musashi?"

Masazumi thought about the meaning of this negotiation.

She had already considered what form it would take.

This was a transaction.

It was a transaction in which the two nations attempted to come out on top by trading the rights they had won.

War was not a sport. It was a political act and it was a fight for national interests.

Thus, a nation could use the rights won in war as a political tool to negotiate with another nation.

Masazumi had chosen Date as the first partner for such a deal.

In truth, the loss to Date would not hurt Musashi too much.

Musashi was taking Houjou's side due to a request from Hashiba, so if Date requested some rights from Musashi – assuming it was not simply money or land – it would likely be something that benefited both nations.

*...Even if they tell us to be more accommodating with the trade route rights, that would ultimately benefit us too.*

If they could not cancel out that victory, Musashi could likely guide Date toward requesting rights of that nature.

"Judge." Masazumi nodded. "What would Date like to cancel it out?"

"Well," said Narumi. "Don't you just have to defeat me?"

**Gold Mar:** “Uqui... Narumin is being extremely unreasonable...”

**Uqui:** “Well, the actual blame lies with Shirojiro for turning into udon...”

**Me:** “So that idiot will be making noodles now, huh?”

**Marube-ya:** “Please don’t put it like that! He isn’t udon yet! The dough is still being kneaded!”

**Vice President:** “Come to think of it, the goal of my negotiation here is to make Udon Bertoni human again...”

**Asama:** “That doesn’t sound like fun...”

**Marube-ya:** “And whose fault is that, Miss Big Boobs!”

**Worshiper:** “Why did Bertoni-kun even go to the battlefield in the first place?”

**Marube-ya:** “Huh? To get money, of course. What kind of stupid question is that?”

**Worshiper:** “Wh-why are you looking down on me for not knowing that!?”

The divine transmissions were set up so the people at Odawara could not see Musashi’s divine transmission situation.

Narumi watched as the Vice President closed the sign frames whenever they appeared around her.

*...It looks a lot like she’s trying not to remain uninformed as she holds this meeting...*

In truth, it was no more than the master of the control room holding back the overexcited barbarians.

That said, Narumi could not blame them for being that way.

The skill of Musashi’s people was undeniable. In a way, they did not match the averages of other nations, but they had personnel with the important skills. So from the perspective of other nations, Musashi was a troublesome opponent

who made attacks and responses that did not fit the normal rules.

She had dealt with that troublesome aspect herself, so she decided to say what she had to say.

“Do you not want to fight me?”

“Hmm, wait just a second. I’ll call this an emergency and ask.”

The Vice President opened a new sign frame.

Ookubo was in an automaton-run bathhouse.

But not because she wanted to be.

The Satomi Student Council President had tried to hide there and she had followed.

Righteousness had returned to the Musashi using its autonomous movement and the Satomi Student Council President was carrying a survival kit bag she had taken from Righteousness.

Taking a bath on the battlefield was a silly idea and the Vice President might use it as part of a pun about a bath-tle, but it was a good hiding place since no one would expect anyone to be there.

Just to be sure, they took a ten minute break in the changing room to make sure no one was headed in after them.

After that, the Satomi Student Council President waved Ookubo further in.

“This is some emergency underwear. It was made at the Asama Shrine, so the charms give it some defensive effects. Wear it in the bath just to be safe.”

That meant Ookubo had to change her equipment and get a fresh start. The Satomi Student Council President had said she wanted to wash away her sweat, but now that they were here...

*...She was really just helping me out, wasn't she?*

This was her rest period, but she was instead helping protect Ookubo. But Ookubo’s personality made it easier for her if she was being dragged around by someone else.

*...Oh, this is why the Vice President is always walking all over me, isn't it?*

She sighed in her heart and asked a question while unfolding the underwear.

"The processing and the material are more like a swimsuit... What size is it?"

"The sides can be adjusted if it's too tight around the hips."

*I see, she thought as she started changing. But then a sign frame popped up:*

"Hey, Ookubo. I have an emergency matter to discuss."

"...Huh? What is it, Vice President?"

"Well," replied the Vice President. But then she looked at Ookubo. "What are you doing?"

"Oh," said Ookubo while feeling annoyed she had to explain this. "I'm just stripping for a bath."

**Scarred:** "Is something the matter?"

**Vice President:** "Eh? Well, there was some static at the end, but Ookubo just said something about stripping for a battle..."

**Bell:** "Eh? S-stripping for...a battle...?"

**Flat Vassal:** "Suzu-san, stop! Stop right there! You'll overload the meter!"

**Mar-Ga:** "So it's one of *those* types of battles? Yes. That's right. It must be. Yes. Definitely. What else could it be? That has to be it. It is. Don't you think, Margot?"

**Gold Mar:** "Sure, let's go with that."

**Silver Wolf:** "Why do you encourage her!?"

Ookubo saw the Vice President ask a question with an oddly refreshing smile.

"As the person responsible, I guess I should ask: who is it with?"

"Judge. I guess you would say it is with the Satomi Student Council President."



“Huh?”

Masazumi saw Adele tilt her head.

Adele asked a question while using a toothpick to pick up some melon sashimi that had been made at some point.

“Isn’t the Satomi Student Council President in her rest period? Why is she taking part in *that* kind of battle?”

“Hmm, they may have made some kind of deal on the scene...”

Masazumi tilted her head. But...

“If Ookubo is engaged in a battle – so to speak – then I guess we can’t use her against the Date Vice Chancellor.”

**Mar-Ga:** “More importantly, Masazumi, shouldn’t we be stopping this ‘battle’ between two second years?”

“That’s awfully reasonable of you. What happened?”

**Mar-Ga:** “Well, I finished drawing the storyboard, so my wicked thoughts cleared up, leaving my heart pure.”

“That was supposed to be rhetorical and now I really wish I hadn’t asked!”

Naito responded to Masazumi.

**Gold Mar:** “How should I put this? When neither side takes the dominant role, beginners tend to fail with this kind of thing...”

“Yes,” agreed Mary while nodding a few times in agreement. “My sister always acts so tough because she likes to maintain an image of being in control.”

“Mary-dono? I do not think Elizabeth-dono is doing that on purpose. I feel more like it is just her personality...”

*I have to agree,* thought Masazumi as she sent a divine transmission to Ookubo.

“Hey, Representative Council Head, hurry into the bath! My god of war rescue

equipment had spell charms for exhaustion reduction and injury healing divine protections, so I used them on the bathwater. You're not really supposed to transfer it to the water like that, so the effects don't last long!"

*Why does she always seem ready to fight at any moment?* wondered Ookubo as she held up a sign frame.

"Wait just a moment. How should I put this? I just got a weird divine transmission."

"Huh?"

The Satomi Student Council President turned back, so Ookubo held up the divine mail in front of the sliding door to the bath.

It said, "Listen. If you and the Satomi Student Council President are beginners, I'm being told you shouldn't be doing this."

"...Beginners at what?"

It made no sense.

But after a bit, the Satomi Student Council President looked up at the ceiling.

"Oh. If she means at bathhouse etiquette, then she may be right."

"No, I know that well enough. ...Because Musashi has a lot of bathhouses. For example..."

Ookubo clapped her hands. The surprisingly dry sound reverberated across the heated bath.

An automaton in a bathhouse swimsuit and apron slid open the glass door.

"Oh?"

The Satomi Student Council President tilted her head and Ookubo nodded.

"If you take a bath after working up a sweat from running and fighting, you can get dehydrated. So how about ordering something to drink? ...Okay?"

When the other girl tilted her head further, Ookubo continued.

"This is how experts do it."

“I told the beginners what you said to tell them. I don’t really get it myself, but that should be enough right?”

While Masazumi explained that to Naruze via divine transmission, the Date Vice Chancellor tilted her head on the next sign frame over.

“What is going on?”

*Oops. I kept her waiting,* thought Masazumi as she hurriedly got back to that girl.

But next to her, Futayo replied in her stead.

“Narumi-dono, Masazumi has an idea, so could you wait a moment?”

“What kind of idea?”

“Judge. ...Ookubo-dono and the Satomi Student Council President are currently in a bathhouse having a certain kind of battle as sex friends. Masazumi is in charge here, so she is obligated to supervise.”

*...What are you saying...!?*

“Okay then,” replied the Date Vice Chancellor.

*...Don’t just accept that...!*

But Horizon tapped her on the shoulder.

She held out a plate of melon sashimi and spoke.

“Just let it slide. If you try to help out every single time something awful happens to someone else in Musashi, you will never have time for anything else.”

“And for some reason, they end up resenting me afterwards.”

*Fine, then,* thought Masazumi. It was about time for Ookubo and the Satomi Student Council President to learn how cruel reality could be. As second years, they were only a year away from the third year, so there was no need to hold back.

“So for that reason, we do not have anyone we know who can defeat you, Date Vice Chancellor.”

“What about the curry fairy?”

“He is in his rest period.”

**Uqui:** “Ask her if she wants to eat some.”

*Should I really do that?* wondered Masazumi as she asked.

“Did you want to eat Furubushi’s curry?”

No response. However...

**Uqui:** “For the next choice, go with ‘You can eat all you want when you return to Musashi’.”

*...What do you mean by “choice”?*

Masazumi was sweating in her heart, but she said it anyway.

“Y-you can eat all you want when you return to Musashi.”

“...Are you trying to lure me in with food?”

**Vice President:** “Hey! Urquiaga! Now she’s wary!”

**Uqui:** “You fool! The emotional response is proof that this was the right choice!”

**Vice President:** “You’re clearly treating this like a porn game.”

**Uqui:** “This is nothing so shallow, Masazumi...! I have completed an elder sister porn game every single day since I came of age. That is approximately 700 of them. And if you include the all-ages elder sister games from before that, the number would be at least 1500!”

**Vice President:** “...Couldn’t you have made some kind of incredible accomplishment if you had used that time on something else?”

**Uqui:** “You fool! ...Then let me ask you this: Have you simulated more than 1500 conversations with an elder sister character!?”

**Vice President:** “Of course I haven’t.”

**Uqui:** “Well, I have...! Ergo, I win...!”

Had they just shifted into a world where the rules were defined by the most pathetic people?

**Uqui:** “Now, for the next choice, say ‘We will include a box of sake.’ ”

*If anything happens, I’m blaming him,* she decided as she said it.

“We will include a box of sake.”

“...That sounds nice.”

*...She’s going for it...!*

**Uqui:** “Heh heh heh. Well, Masazumi? How do you like my elder sister character conversational skills...!? Now for the final choice: ‘How about some pickled leek to go with it?’ ”

**Vice President:** “How about some pickled leek to go with it?”

“Even better.”

The Date Vice Chancellor smiled bitterly. And...

“Kiyonari is there, isn’t he?”

**Mar-Ga:** “He’s been found out! This is getting juicy!”

**Asama:** “Of course she’ll notice when he uses her exact preferences and drinking etiquette...”

**Flat Vassal:** “What are yours like, Asama-san?”

**Asama:** “W-well, I’m trying to cut back. Yes...”

**Wise Sister:** “Heh heh. That’s right! If she told us that, we could win her route right away! If she doesn’t try to put on airs, she’d be worth even less than the wolf who shows off her love of meat dishes for all to see!”

**Silver Wolf:** “Why am I receiving friendly fire again!?”

Narumi compared the two sign frames.

On the one to the right, Katakura was dancing and making strange noises.

On the one to the left, the Vice President was forcing a smile while sign frames appeared and disappeared around her.

They both had their issues. But...

*...This is not good.*

She was on Date's side right now, but she was curious what everyone was saying on that left sign frame. They had probably used her as a starting point while getting sidetracked in a number of strange ways.

But that felt like a present matter rather than something nostalgic. So by Musashi's rules...

*...My present is in danger if I let them say weird things about me.*

Nothing Katakura said and none of the strange noises he made mattered since she had left there. But Musashi's aggressive world was a current threat.

She needed to end this conversation properly.

"I more or less understand."

Narumi thought about the Musashi personnel.

"I defeated the Treasurer earlier. The curry fairy is currently in his rest period, but you're going to have him retreat soon anyway, aren't you? Lastly, the Representative Council Head is presently occupied with a 'battle' against Satomi Yoshiyasu."

Satomi Yoshiyasu had really changed.

In the past, the girl had never talked about anything sexual or even romantic.

*...Coming to Musashi really changes a person.*

Narumi was no exception, so she was not going to find fault with Yoshiyasu's change. But...

"If there is no one from Musashi for me to fight, then it would be time for negotiations."

These would be international negotiations, but she was a fighter and she was not familiar with Date's current situation.

Since she knew she could not negotiate via combat...

"Katakura, I'll act as the intermediary, so you make the decisions. ...What kind

of rights would we accept for canceling out my win over Musashi?”

Katakura pondered it.

*...Oh, what's this? Yes, what is this about?*

The situation in Odawara was being sent to him. Houjou had informed him of the divine transmission restrictions with Narumi, so he had access to all the information someone on the scene would have.

Also, this exchange was being viewed as an “emergency issue” between nations, so Data and Musashi could negotiate via Odawara.

With that in mind, the topic at hand was their victory over Musashi and what rights they could be given.

*...Musashi must not want any losses on their record.*

After this, they had the Kantou Liberation, several more large battles, and finally Westphalia.

What would they do if they had a disadvantage placed on them with all that on the horizon?

If they could erase it, they would want to make an immediate counterattack. That was the purpose of this discussion.

*But, thought Katakura. How is exchanging rights for a battle outcome any different from post-war reconciliation?*

Musashi had to have an idea here.

*In that case,* thought Katakura while sticking a finger in his ear to reduce his energy level.

A high energy level was only really useful for combat and harassment.

A low energy level was the correct choice for negotiations.

“Now, then...”

He lowered his shoulders in something of a disheartened mood.

“What are you proposing to trade for our victory, Musashi Vice President?”

Masazumi realized Date was onboard with this.

Looking at this normally, they were simply holding the reconciliation in advance. But doing it here showed a different intention.

If they did it in advance, could Date maybe gain something more beneficial from it?

But Masazumi did not want to lose more than necessary. And most importantly...

*...I want to know their true purposes in this battle and how they will respond to Musashi.*

The latter was especially important with the major battle of the Kantou Liberation approaching.

So she opened her mouth.

“There is something I would like to ask.”

This was what she had to ask here.

“What about Musashi does Date like?”

This was a political discussion, but she avoided directly stating it.

If she made it sound too much like a transaction, it would give them an out by letting them balk at being “bribed”. So even though it was a pain, she stated it more indirectly.

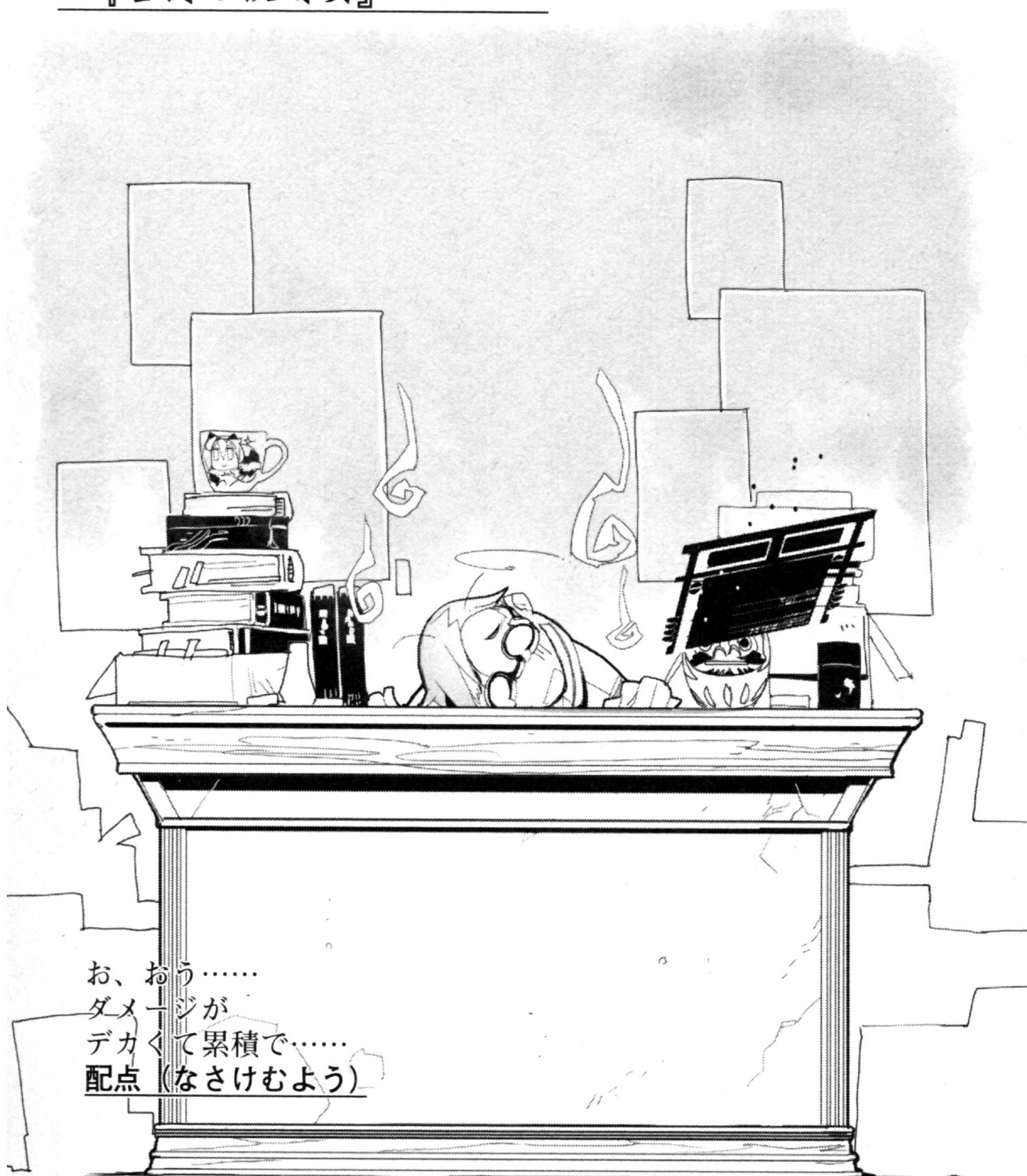
“You discussed this with our ambassador before, didn’t you? So could you tell us what you like?”



# **Chapter 54: Decisive Woman of a Snowy Nation**

# 第五十四章

## 『雪国の決断女』



お、おう……  
ダメージが  
デカくて累積で……  
配点（なさけむよう）

*O-ohh...*

*That's a lot of damage*

*And it's accumulating...*

### **Point Allocation (No Mercy)**

Narumi played the role of intermediary by listening to the Musashi Vice President.

*...I see.*

If Musashi made a suggestion themselves, it could be seen as going a step too far.

So they were asking Date to make a demand.

The Musashi Vice President had asked what about Musashi they like. In other words, “tell us what you want to take from Musashi”.

If that was something Musashi was willing to give them, it would not be a problem.

If it exceeded that willingness, they would negotiate it down.

So how would Date respond to this?

“Katakura. Listen up. I will tell you what they said.”

“Yes, thank you... Please tell me...”

He was fortunately in a low-energy mood. She would not have to deal with his unbearable annoyingness.

Narumi nodded a few times as she continued.

“You spoke with Musashi’s ambassador before, right?”

“Yes, I did...”

*...That should save some time.*

They used to be on the same side. They still were technically, but she had been away for a while. Fortunately, it seemed they could still communicate

properly. So Narumi got straight to the point.

“Tell me what you liked.”

Katakura raised his head.

*...What does that mean?*

During this roundabout negotiation, Narumi had just asked him to do the following: “Tell you what I liked about Musashi’s ambassador?”

Narumi felt something off about what Katakura said.

*...I think there’s something wrong with that.*

But this was Katakura. He may have converted it into something more convenient for himself.

And he was Date’s representative, so even if he had mistaken the meaning in a way more convenient for himself, that was Date’s choice here.

Narumi was only an intermediary. She reminded herself of that and prompted Katakura to continue.

“Tell me.”

“Testament.” Katakura nodded. “I liked how sweet she was... And...um, how she would act all nervous...um, and, uh...oh, but also how she has such strength deep down. Y’know, like with Masamune-kun. Right?”

Narumi had a thought as she watched her former colleague hold his arms to his chest and wiggle around.

*...Yes, Kiyonari would never act like this...*

He would be blunt and direct.

*This is really throwing me off*, was all she thought since she had become quite accustomed to her current life.

Katakura’s bizarre statements and actions continued, but she knew what he was trying to say.

Narumi passed Date's demand on to the Musashi Vice President.

"The Date Clan wants...Musashi's ambassador."

"They want Musashi's ambassador...!?"

Masazumi questioned Narumi's response.

*...Are they saying they want an ambassador permanently stationed with them?*

Musashi could not have hoped for a better request. To keep trade running smoothly, Musashi would set up companies they invested in and use those as intermediaries for the Provisional Council. But her father and the others on the council had authority over them, so they did not work directly for the academy. If the other side wanted them to officially establish a permanent ambassador rather than a temporary one sent in for a specific negotiation...

*...We would gain so much!*

"So are they saying they want a permanent Musashi ambassador?"

Narumi nodded once and spoke to Katakura.

That pervert was still wiggling around as a show of respect for Musashi Ambassador Mukai Suzu.

*I can't let anyone else see this...* she thought while relaying the message.

"Katakura, so do you want the Musashi ambassador?"

"Eh...? I can...have her...?"

He made a slow tempo spin and spread his arms in a downer fashion.

"Are you saying...she'll come to be...my wife...?"

"Yes, yes. Testament, testament."

"That disinterested response... I would expect no less from you..."

She could not afford to let his energy level rise. Because he would get annoying.

But the “wife” part might complicate things.

*I should probably soften that one a bit,* she decided.

“Musashi Vice President, ask your ambassador if they like Katakura.”

“Ask our ambassador...?”

*...If they like him? What?*

Masazumi did not know what Narumi meant. Sending an ambassador was a political act. Whether you liked or disliked someone was not really the issue.

*...But I guess the work would be easier if they’re compatible.*

*Maybe that’s what she means,* decided Masazumi as she asked.

“The ambassador to Date was Mukai, right?”

“Eh? Wh-what?”

Mukai must have been surprised to have the conversation focus on her. She tilted her head and she held up a light-blocking sign frame that Asama had given her.

“Is there...some kind of...problem?”

“Well... Hey, uh, Date had a Vice President, right? Name of Katakura?”

Mukai looked up into the air when asked that.

She thought for a few seconds. It took her that long.

“Judge. Yes. I remember.”

*So he was that unimportant to her,* realized Masazumi.

“Then,” Masazumi began. “Would you say you like or dislike the idea of working with him as a diplomatic partner?”

Mukai tilted her head at that.

“Hmm?”

“Oh, uh, you don’t have to give it that much thought. Just give me your initial impression of the idea.”

“Oh, okay. Then...I don’t dislike the idea...I guess.”

“Judge,” replied Masazumi. *Then there’s a chance of it working*, she thought.

“Date Vice Chancellor. She says she doesn’t dislike him.”

Should she reply with “judge” or “testament”?

Narumi hesitated for a moment before nodding. Then she faced the sign frame on the right.

“Katakura, I have the answer.”

“Eh? H-how did it go...? What does she think...?”

“Judge,” replied Narumi. *She said she doesn’t dislike him. Which means...*

“She was not willing to say she liked you.”

After a short pause, Katakura rapidly sunk down below the screen.

She heard the dull sound of flesh and bone hitting the floor.

After about seven seconds, a trembling hand rose into view and the rest of his body entered the bottom of the screen.

“What is it, Katakura?”

“I-it doesn’t bother you at all to deliver such a shocking message, does it!?”

“Why would it? ...I only told the truth. How about you face reality?”

“And now you’re rubbing salt in the wound!?”

“Calm down.”

“And now...you’re rubbing salt...in the wound...?”

He seemed even lower energy than before, but that was fine.

However, he suddenly raised his head and spoke while staggering.

“Um, did that bangs ambassador really say that?”

“More or less.”

“W-wait. ...Please check. Was it really that ambassador girl?”

He was stubborn, but it was a warrior's mercy to see their opponent through to the end. Narumi took a breath and faced forward.

A fox was eating soba.

*What an odd image,* thought Narumi while sensing a true battlefield here.

*...You never know what will happen. In that sense, this too is a proper battlefield.*

She too brought her chopsticks to her soba.

The soba was a little dry, so she soaked the bite in the bowl of sauce.

"I see you don't play by the rules."

She ignored the fox's exasperated comment.

"I prefer it this way right now."

"You could continue doing it 'this way' forever by saying that."

"Wouldn't that be a lot easier? ...Easier than having to make and receive weird explanations, I mean."

Yoshiaki laughed at that.

"What a troublesome girl."

She nearly said "and you are a troublesome woman", but she stopped herself. Conversing with a fox would only get her tricked.

"Narumi-kun..." said Katakura on the sign frame. "H-have you checked yet...? M-my heart of burning love...has nearly burned down to ashes."

"Wait just a moment. I will have the answer soon."

"Are you at...a soba restaurant?"

Narumi looked around. This was a café, but...

"Yes. This is a soba restaurant."

With that, she pushed his sign frame away with her elbow and turned toward the one on the left.

"Musashi Vice President? ...Who is the ambassador we are discussing here?"



*Eh?* thought Masazumi.

*...Is the ambassador not Mukai?*

But once she thought about it, she realized the Date Vice Chancellor had never indicated who the ambassador was.

“Yeah, wait just a bit. Give me three minutes.”

Masazumi brought a hand to her forehead and turned toward Mukai.

The girl tilted her head with a questioning look, so Masazumi said what she had to say.

“Sorry, Mukai. It sounds like the ambassador she was talking about isn’t necessarily you. ...Sorry about asking that creepy question.”

“F-for some reason...I feel like someone somewhere is calling me a creep...”

“Inside Sendai Castle, I expect there about three people per floor calling you that.”

Narumi told him to calm down again while eating the soba she had soaked in the sauce bowl.

“It is best to accept who you are.”

“I’m not sure I want someone giving me life lessons while they eat soba...”

Masazumi looked to the others.

“Is anyone here willing to take a permanent position in Date at some point in the future?”

They all exchanged a glance.

But Naruze immediately shook her head.

“Even with a trade route from Oushuu, it would be hard to attend events, wouldn’t it?”

“Could we send out a dedicated personnel transport ship?”

“No. I draw until morning and then make copies at the general store. I wouldn’t make it in time for the start of the event even with a dedicated ship.”

“And the cold really saps the strength of winged species like us.”

“Too hot is a problem too, though.”

*Is that how it works?* wondered Masazumi as she nodded at the two Technohexen’s comments and looked to the others.

But even after looking around their full group...

“A lot of you have family businesses. I guess we couldn’t send you away from Musashi.”

“On that note, Seijun, Bell-san’s got her bathhouse. She couldn’t be a permanent ambassador.”

“That’s right, foolish brother. Plus, we would be lonely without Suzu around. We wouldn’t be able to hug her and sing songs with her at the bathhouse or grope her during sleepovers.”

After saying that, the Aoi Sister uttered an “ah” of realization. She then pointed toward Augesvarer.

“We can banish you to the north to make up for your loss! Isn’t that a great idea!?”

“Ohh! If that would make up for it, then it is a great idea! I could abuse my diplomatic privileges to line my pockets!”

“Um, Kimi? Heidi?” said Asama. “That might make up for the political loss, but it wouldn’t get rid of the divine punishment.”

“Eh!? Th-then you’re telling me to produce udon in that frigid land!? How would that even work!?”

“My guess is the udon would freeze once it left your body,” suggested Horizon.

“Noooooooo! I don’t want to be a human frozen food maker!”

*...What kind of lament is that?*

It was far too novel. And while Masazumi thought about that, Mukai spoke up.

“Ah, u-um, well...”

She quickly shook her hands side to side.

“If you...tell me to...I would go.”

She said it with a slight smile and everyone fell silent. Eventually, Horizon raised her hand.

“How could we send such a brave soul to the frozen northern land where bears capture salmon, all the houses are probably igloos, the local specialties are probably wood carvings and snow sculptures, and the greatest cause of death is probably ‘killer whales’?”

“...Horizon, make sure to bow down toward Oushuu later.”

“But I agree we can’t possibly send Suzu,” said Masazumi. “Without her, there are a lot of ways that our class will fall apart.”

“Our class is held together by quite an impressive balancing act, isn’t it?”

Just then someone spoke up with a “hey”. It was Urquiaga.

“What is it, Urquiaga?”

“Judge. It is only a suggestion, but I might be an option. ...If Narumi says she wants to return to Date, I could go with her as an ambassador. It is cold there, so I could probably sell bedding acquired from my homeland and I could probably sell elder sister porn games as well.”

“Uqui-dono, are you planning to build up a fortune in a single generation...!?”

“Heh heh heh. My love for my genre is so much greater than yours... You are content enjoying what you have. I prefer to evangelize.”

*Could we just arrest all of them at once?* wondered Masazumi. Then she saw a raised hand.

It was Asama. She turned toward Crossunite and Mary.

“But if Tenzou-kun tried to evangelize his love of Mary...he could be annihilated.”

“D-did you have to directly state what I was already thinking!?” protested Crossunite.

“Hee hee. I don’t often tell people what I like about Master Tenzou, so we’re even.”

“Ohh..” said everyone as they turned toward Crossunite. The ninja hung his profusely-sweating head.

Then Asama asked Mary a question with a smile.

“Was there anything you liked about him recently?”

“Judge. I must have been exhausted from a number of things yesterday because, after a dinner made from what we took from the meeting, I fell asleep on the floor, but when I woke up, he was carrying me in my futon.”

**Gold Mar:** “Ohh...?”

**10ZO:** “W-well, Mary-dono has a habit of grabbing things in her sleep, so if I do not wrap her in her futon first, she will try to grab onto me! And she will cling to my arm and then my body if I try to wake her up...”

**Tachibana Wife:** “I can tell you have actually experienced this.”

**Mar-Ga:** “Ohhh...?”

**10ZO:** “Why does *your* ‘ohhh’ sound so much more dangerous...!?”

Having your sensor sensitivity set high was a good thing. But while Crossunite hung his head and sweated, Mary clung to his arm.

“But since we fell asleep right away yesterday, we went for a morning bath after hanging the futons up to dry. And then we did that thing. ...You know, the one where you throw the rice-bran scrubbing bag over the wall.”

Naomasa sucked in a breath so hard the tip of her *kiseru* grew red.

After the breath, she blew a lot of smoke out her nose and mouth while further words appeared on the sign frame.

**Uqui:** “You did it...?”

**Me:** “Tenzou, I didn’t think you were that kind of guy.”

**10ZO:** “D-don’t say it like that! We did it because we only brought one of them!”

**Gold Mar:** “So who do you think set that up? Ma-yan or Tenzou?”

“Judge, it was me,” said Mary. “When we left the house, I asked him if he wanted to do it and he said we would have to make sure none of the kobolds grabbed it.”

**Sticky King:** “So he used the Smooth Reply ninja technique...”

*...I feel like that ninja technique doesn’t think about the consequences.*

**Vice President:** “But if it was Mary’s idea, then it should be safe from an England diplomacy perspective...”

**Scarred:** “...I couldn’t help myself. But Master Tenzou is always willing to humor me.”

*He can be considerate, I guess,* thought Masazumi before turning toward Urquiaga.

“Well, anyway, summer is approaching. Crossunite’s home will probably be too hot for just a futon. Urquiaga, send them some summer blankets. ...Now, Urquiaga, are you okay with this idea?”

“Judge. It is one option for my relationship with Narumi.”

“Judge,” replied Masazumi. “Date Vice Chancellor. ...Urquiaga will go there as our ambassador. Is that okay?”

*...Kiyonari will?*

Narumi used her chopsticks to lift some soba from the sauce bowl but then dropped it back into the sauce.

Yoshiaki leaned back as if to complain, but she ignored the woman. Instead, she looked to the sign frame on the right.

“Ahh...I want to be loved...”

He was saying something creepy, but Narumi silently tossed some wasabi in the sauce bowl.

She wanted to think for a bit.

“Hmm...”

She meaninglessly stuck her chopsticks into the sauce bowl to mix in the wasabi.

The strong flavor of the sauce should have remained in her mouth, but it was gone.

She figured it would return if she added some sake to her tongue, so she reached for the right of the table.

*...Kiyonari would be stationed permanently in Date?*

She had no idea how they had come up with that idea. She could see no real reason the ambassador had to be him.

*Besides, if I'm being mean, I could describe Oushuu as a frozen land where bears capture salmon, all the houses are igloos, the local specialties are wood carvings and snow sculptures, and the greatest cause of death is "killer whales". That's a bit of an exaggeration, but I'm bragging about my homeland, so the locals are sure to forgive me. No, I must avoid thinking about how that land actually sounds like a good fit for him. But what does it mean that I can easily picture him creating an elder sister porn game character during the annual snow sculpture contest? Then again, what am I supposed to do if he makes a sculpture of me? If I complain, he'll just say it's pretty and ask what I think.*

*This is a problem.*

“...Narumi, what are you thinking about?” asked Yoshiaki.

“I have come across a complicated problem.”

But there was one thing she knew for sure.

*...I left Date and I intend to stand by that decision.*

He had supported Date's fate in order to be with her.

And as a result, she was here now.

She was plenty happy like this.

“Katakura,” she said.

What she had picked up and taken a sip of was not sake. She only now realized it was the tea she had been initially served.

“...The negotiation has failed.”

“Ehh!? W-wait, wait, wait.”

Katakura raised his voice in the command center remade within Sendai Castle.

The large sign frame station in front of him showed Narumi eating soba, noodle by noodle. Some girl fans of hers were commenting.

“I love how languid Narumi-sama seems just before marriage...!”

“The subtle atmosphere of hard work casts the perfect shadow on her...!”

“And the slight difference in the glossiness of her hair hints at such drama...!”

Katakura took a deep breath through his nose and spoke to them.

“Hasn’t she just gotten less disciplined?”

They glared at him like crazy. And finally...

“You worm!”

“You scum!”

“You Katakura!”

“...Hold on! I get worm and scum, but what was the Katakura for!? When did that become an insult!?”

Some male students walked through the hallway outside while carrying mops. They were discussing the cleaning situation.

“Man, that bathroom was so dirty. How should I put it? It was a total Katakura.”

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaait!”

“Ah! Katakura-san! Crap! You were here!? Are you Katakura-ing like usual!? Well good luck living the Katakura life! You make the rest of us guys look better in comparison, so keep it up!”

He waved at them as they bowed and left, but Narumi spoke from the large screen behind him.

“That word will definitely be on the entrance exams next year.”

“Jealous!? Jealous, aren’t you?”

“Do I need to call Principal Yoshihime?”

“Wh-why would you suggest something so horrifying, Mrs. Wife!?”

“I’m not a wife yet.”

The girls shrieked in delight, but Katakura mimed spitting on the floor before continuing.

“Then I’ll call you centipede girl!”

“Calm down.”

“...Right, anyway. So, um...what in the world is this about?”

“Yes... It turns out the ambassador they were talking about was Kiyonari and not Mukai Suzu.”

“Wait!” shouted Katakura. “You’re telling me I was wiggling for a guy this whole time!?”

“Achoo!”

“Huh? Katagiri-kun, do you have a cold?”

“No, um, I just felt a chill all of a sudden. ...How are you feeling, Takenaka-san?”

“Oh, I’m fine,” said Takenaka while facing forward below a sun-blocking *lernen figur*.

The telescope spell *lernen figur* in front of her showed the green of a wheat field. Beyond that vast field, she could finally see the Hashiba forces surrounding Paris and the Hexagone Française forces facing them.

“...They aren’t moving,” said Katagiri.

“Oh, our flooding is making progress.”



But their opponent was not moving. She did not know why, but...

“I have a bad feeling about this.” Takenaka waved toward Katagiri on his *lernen figur*. “Anyway, there is something I want you to look into. Can you do that for me? You’ll have to actually move around some, but it would make me really happy if you did it.”

“This doesn’t make me happy at all... Ah, but Narumi-kun. Can you ask them something?”

“What now?”

“Well, y’know, what that bangs girl thinks of me. I mean, the previous answer was from that half-dragon, right?”

“...Understood. Don’t let the answer kill you, whatever it might be.”

Masazumi received another question from Narumi:

“What does Mukai think of the Date Vice President?”

It was a bizarre question. Taking it at face value, it was only talking about her personal feelings.

*...Besides, Mukai isn’t an ambassador right now.*

And Narumi had only just said the negotiations had failed.

So was this mention of Mukai based on a misunderstanding?

For now, Masazumi decided to answer their question based on the assumption the negotiation was still on.

“Um, Ambassador Candidate?”

Thus, she assumed they were mistaken to specify Mukai.

“Urquiaga, Date has a question for you. What do you think of the Date Vice President?”

“Can I call him annoying?”

“Well, no, you can’t do that. It would cause an international incident.”

The idiot was looking at her. And he held a finger to his mouth.

“Hm~? So you’re allowed to say it about me cause it’s a domestic thing~? Is that it, Masazumi-sensei~?”

“That’s creepy, so stop it, idiot.”

“You didn’t need to make such a direct attack!”

She always did that, so she was unsure what she had done wrong.

But Urquiaga skillfully crossed his arms and nodded.

“Then I think we can leave this to Narumi. Tell her to answer the question in my place.”

“Judge,” replied Masazumi. “I will relay that to the Date Vice Chancellor.”

“Katakura I have the answer.”

“Eh!? Wh-what did she say!?”

“You’re annoying. Also...stop jumping around.”

On the screen, Katakura quickly fell to his knees, but he soon recovered.

“W-wait! I feel like you let your own biases color that one!”

“...Everyone feels the same way,” she said. “Anyway, I will make the rest of the decisions on site. Because we need to redo these negotiations.”

With those final words, Narumi ended the divine transmission with Date.

“Now then,” she said, prompting the fox in front of her to speak.

“What will you do?”

“I have one question for Mogami.”

“What is it?”

Narumi answered that question with her question.

“Does Mogami want the rights earned by defeating Musashi?”

*...This girl...!*

Yoshiaki took the tempura she had ordered and thought, *She knows you need bait to catch a fox.*

Yoshiaki was on Musashi's side.

She owed them after the incident with Komahime.

Foxes were known for cursing people, but if they joined you as a protector, they would stay with you forevermore.

At the very least, she would not complain as long as they did nothing to push her away and gave her periodic rewards.

And Musashi would make sure to treat her accordingly.

They would save her family, assist her, preserve her pride, and give Ushuu a future.

So she would be the fox that lived in the mountains behind Musashi.

That was the actual relationship between Edo and Oushuu. The back mountains of Ushuu bordered Uesugi and Date. Musashi had saved the fox's daughter and now they sought her help.

Mogami Yoshiaki.

She was a top-level daimyo in the Warring States period.

She was looking ahead to the Siege of Odawara and the Kantou Liberation.

How much of her power could she use?

Supplying her with an opportunity to wield that power was bait for her. But...

"Are you saying you will give Mogami 'proof of having harmed Musashi'?"

"Wouldn't that be more meaningful for you than 'proof of having harmed Hashiba'?"

That was true.

Mogami had been alienated from Hashiba since the Komahime incident. And they would be fully on Matsudaira's side after Hashiba's death.

The rights of the Hashiba forces were meaningless for Mogami. Looking at the

history recreation, they would receive nothing from Hashiba for that.

*But,* thought Yoshiaki.

“It would not.”

She spoke as if exhaling the heat that had built up deep in her chest. And she fanned herself as if to hide that breath.

“Proof of having harmed Hashiba would be meaningful for Musashi, wouldn’t it? And handing that over to them is my role, not yours. ...So you can wait.”

“...Wait? For what?”

“For when Musashi challenges you to a second duel. You can wait until then.”

Yoshiaki said that and Narumi’s expression wordlessly changed.

“So you do understand.”

Her eyes remained flat and she smiled with her mouth alone.

This was not a true smile.

It was a look that seemed to hide the thought “How do you know about that?”

*...Oh, how scary.*

*Northern women sure are cold and hard.*

*...But this requires caution because Musashi has melted her...*

However, saying that to her would accomplish nothing.

Yoshiaki grabbed some salted wakasagi tempura as she spoke once more.

“I will give you one piece of advice. You can pass it on to Musashi as your own finding.”

“Advice?”

“Testament.” Yoshiaki narrowed her eyes. “There is a nation that will want the rights of victory over Mouri. Of course...”

Of course...

“Mouri has their Logismo Oplo, so Musashi must defeat them. So if they wish

to give that nation a victory over Mouri, they will need a second victory against Mouri. ...I could always do that myself...but, well, once Musashi has that, it will be of great use to them.”

Mitotsudaira saw Masazumi place her hand on her chin as she viewed a sign frame.

She seemed to be wiping her mouth, which suggested the negotiations were complete. However...

“That was a valuable opinion.”

“What do you mean?”

“To repay us for the failed negotiation, Date provided a small idea for an intermediary action. ...And that gives us a reason to fight Mouri.”

“Mouri...?”

Mouri was a large nation to the west and it was possible Musashi would face them at Sekigahara later on.

But Mouri had a major bargaining chip.

“...Are you saying we have a reason beyond fighting for the Logismoi Oplo?”

“Let’s just say it’s a possibility. If we can get a victory over Houjou, then all is well. But if we can’t, I want to get an extra victory over Mouri as insurance.”

Masazumi took a breath as she spoke.

“Give us some wins out there. ...We have a wider range of targets now.”

Yoshiyasu faced someone unexpected.

There had already been someone in the bathhouse’s bath.

*...What is going on?*

She had checked the changing room. There had been no sign of anyone using the clothes baskets or lockers.

But with Ookubo standing behind her, she saw someone relaxing in the bath.

The girl had a case full of her luggage and she had carried it into the bath area.

“Kani Saizou?”

“...Eh!?”

Kani had been using a sign frame to view a sightseeing map of Odawara, but she stood up in a panic.

She wore one of the swimsuits you could rent from the bathhouse. Which meant...

*...Is this during a rest period for her?*

Yoshiyasu and Ookubo had wanted to hide in here for as long as possible.

Yoshiyasu could not use Righteousness at the moment and Ookubo was the literary type, so while they might be able to handle a normal student, their odds of victory were low against someone at the Special Duty Officer level. So to take the safest route, they had been thinking of finding a good hiding spot and waiting out the Siege of Odawara. The bathhouse had looked like a good spot, but...

“I guess not.”

“Eh!?”

Kani turned around after closing the Gagaku player spell and manga sign frame opened around her.

“Y-you guess not what!?”

“Nothing. Just talking to myself.”

One of the sign frames Kani had closed had showed the state of her own injuries.

That meant she had not intended to buy time here.

*...She must plan to heal her wounds and head back out there.*

Bringing her case of luggage into the bath area had almost certainly been wariness about this unfamiliar land.

They had caught her at a bad time.

Kani would likely challenge them to a duel.

Would it be better for Yoshiyasu or Ookubo to accept that challenge?

Yoshiyasu thought about Kani's strength and the strength of those outside the bathhouse.

Honjou Shigenaga and Date Narumi would be ready to battle again before long. The same would be true of the Reine des Garous. She had not run across Seki Masasada or Katou Yoshiaki, but they had to be quite powerful too.

Compared to those options...

*...This girl would be an easier opponent...*

She was injured and both her weapon and body would have been worn down by her previous battle.

However, Yoshiyasu did not have a weapon. Ookubo carried a long and short sword at her hip, but those were currently in a changing room locker.

Yoshiyasu tried to figure out what to do, but just then...

"Kani Saizou, this is your rest period, isn't it?"

"Testament! It is!"

"Then," said Ookubo as she stepped past Yoshiyasu.

Yoshiyasu gave her a look of protest, but Ookubo nodded in her direction.

The look in her eyes said she had an idea and she raised a sign frame in her hand.

"Well, once your rest period is over, I suppose I could challenge you."

"Challenge me!? To a duel!?"

"Yes." Ookubo nodded. And, "But since this is a bathhouse...Kani Saizou."

Ookubo revealed what she was challenging the girl to.

"Today I challenge you to karaoke."

# Chapter 55: Surprise Attacker at the Festival



# 第五十五章

## 『祭場の不意打ち者』



ええと、あの、私、  
……どうしてしまったんでしょう……

配点（初心者）

*Um, uh, I*

*...What is happening to me...?*

### **Point Allocation (Beginner)**

Mitotsudaira heard a sudden voice while she and the silver chains cleaned up after eating.

It was Masazumi who was stacking up paper plates.

“Huh? What is this?”

“...What is what?”

“Judge,” said the girl while holding up something related to the next duel for a Musashi fighter.

A request had been sent in advance of the actual duel in the Odawara city.

“That is from the Representative Committee Head, isn’t it?”

She had evidently found a convenient opponent. But she must have needed time to prepare or something because she had sent in a request to ensure she was not attacked or challenged to a duel by another opponent in the meantime.

It was a solid defensive move that was very much like her.

And it provided the type of duel the Representative Committee Head was requesting.

“...Karaoke?”

“I could see someone settling on that format after some discussion. ...Think of it like Uta-awase.”

“Judge,” agreed Kanou who was waiting to the side. She looked to the Odawara city before continuing. “She often participates in karaoke to entertain guests. She can earn very high scores, so I assume she is using that to ensure an advantage over her opponent in this ‘duel’.”

“I see...”

*There are so many different ways to fight, thought Mitotsudaira.*

“Hey, everyone, the festival stands are about to be switched out for the night ones, so this is your last chance to order any of the afternoon foods.”

Some occasional blue gaps were visible in the sky as Tenzou walked down from the festival stands.

Tenzou pointed back toward the festival.

“The stands are being swapped out and I only stopped by to inspect the new stands, but I didn’t see any problems. The old stands are selling their food for cheap, so if you want to stock up, now would be the time.”

Adele clenched her right fist when she heard that. And Naomasa raised her hand.

“I’m going to go cool off back at the main base. Righteousness has apparently returned to the Musashi up above, so I want to compare the malfunctions and damaged parts to Suzaku’s patterns.”

“Are you gathering autonomous movement data, 6th Special Duty Officer?”

“More or less. And by checking which parts Suzaku tends to damage more often, I can guess where Righteousness will damage itself. Units that can fight autonomously are rare even on the Musashi, so I’ve suddenly gotten a lot busier when it comes to data management and application.”

“Judge.” Tenzou nodded but then looked to Masazumi and the others who were discussing something. “Did something happen in Odawara?”

“Ookubo says she’ll be fighting a duel via karaoke, so we were discussing what kinds of songs are popular these days. ...That’s an area I have almost no knowledge in.”

“Is that so? ...Well, competing in verse is an ancient tradition used by the Heian nobles and later in renga matches. It sounds perfect for a literary type like Ookubo-dono.”

“That’s true,” everyone agreed.

Just then, Mary stood up within the group. She held up a bag of burnable trash in each hand.

“Master Tenzou.”

“J-judge! If you were about to throw out that trash, I could take it for you.”

“Oh, no. I can go too, so please take this one.”

She handed him one of the full bags. After checking the location of the garbage dump on a sign frame, she opened a few more sign frames and bowed toward Asama.

When she noticed Mary’s action, Asama smiled and waved back.

Then Mary turned toward Tenzou with a smile.

“Okay, let’s go, Master Tenzou. And, um...”

Tenzou knew what she was going to say, so he said it first.

“Mary-dono, how about we take a look around the afternoon festival while we still can?”

At first, Mary did not understand what he had said to her.

...*Eh?*

He had *invited her* out for some fun while in front of everyone. She hesitated over that fact.

Just as Masazumi had said in the divine chat earlier, they had their diplomatic relations with England to worry about. So it was always her who invited him to share in her interests and curiosities.

Also, he could be somewhat shy. She knew full well that he was taking good care of her and she felt blessed by that, but...

...*He generally only invites me to do something when it is necessary...*

And this was in front of everyone. He tended to avoid festivals and other public areas like this.

That was why she had tried to invite him while giving him a good excuse, but...

“U-umm.”

He had predicted it and invited her instead.

*Most likely, she thought, he invited me himself so I wouldn't have to invite him.* But when she thought about it...

*...He doesn't think I am an indecent girl who does the inviting herself, does he?*

She wanted to deny it. She wanted to say that was not what this was about. But...

"Um, uh..."

She could not raise her lowered head. She could feel heat gradually filling her downturned cheeks.

And what was this?

*...Water lilies?*

Ether water lilies were starting to blossom around her.

*What do I do?* she wondered.

*...I'm being indecent, yet I feel so happy that Master Tenzou invited me himself...*

Asama saw something unbelievable.

Next to her face, Hanami frantically pointed a sign frame her way. It showed the surrounding ley lines growing abnormally active.

Because Mary had some dryad blood in her veins, her emotions were interfering with the ley lines and raising their energy level. The ether flowers blossoming around her were proof enough of that.

"No..."

Mary brushed away the surrounding flowers without raising her head.

She was embarrassed to have her emotions so visible. However...

**Gold Mar:** "You've really done it now, Tenzou..."

**Mar-Ga:** "That was way too much of a surprise attack... This is the kind of bombshell you drop when you aren't used to dealing with women."

**Flat Vassal:** “Um, what are you talking about?”

Asama understood. At times like this, Mary would usually invite Tenzou.

Because Tenzou felt so much responsibility concerning her, he took good care of her. After all, she was a crucial part of England’s future. Carelessly interfering with that would cause an international incident.

Mary understood that as well, so she made a point of inviting him herself.

*...When she does the inviting, the responsibility lies with England.*

But Tenzou had broken that rule. He had invited Mary before she could invite him.

It had probably been a casual thing for him. It had looked like he simply spoke up so Mary would not have to invite him out for some fun before a major battle. However...

**Asama:** “For Mary, that flipped a lot of things on their head and affirmed everything...”

Mary must have thought she would continue inviting him until she was confident she could act as a part of England’s history.

But that had changed.

The change had probably come from Masazumi and Mary’s earlier exchange.

Tenzou probably had not thought about it too deeply, but he had made a decision.

He had decided to enjoy the present instead of just using the present as insurance for the future.

**Gold Mar:** “But Ma-yan has no idea what to do since he sprung it on her without warning.”

Because...

**Gold Mar:** “Tenzou’s in the smooth mode he used to confess and he’s saying he’ll continue on like this forever.”

Mary was troubled.

*...What am I supposed to do...?*

She could not look him in the eye.

No, he had only invited her to the festival. So couldn't she just accept that invitation?

She only had to be as detached as her sister.

*...I-I can't...!*

It had been too much of a surprise attack. He had suddenly accepted her and everything that entailed.

This was not the same as going shopping, on walks, or to the academy. Even if it was a history recreation, they were essentially going out for some fun before a battle.

And he had cut her off so she would not have to act indecently in front of others.

Her invitation played no role here.

If anything happened, all of the responsibility would lie with him.

She understood what that meant.

But that was the entire point.

When he had confessed to her, she had felt like she could leave everything with him and trust him. That same feeling existed in the present rather than in some distant future.

Everything from that London night to now had not just been insurance for the future.

It had all been the same.

She had been relieved to have him taking care of her, but she may also have felt a happy resignation about that luxurious time.

So this had been a surprise attack.

She had indecently felt relieved in their happiness and thought it was all

about a distant future.

“Um.”

But now she felt she could experience unrestrained happiness in the present.

And when she realized that, she saw a color around her.

It was white.

The ether water lilies were blossoming so wildly that waving her hand around only spread them meaninglessly around.

Just then, she heard his voice.

“Mary-dono, the fun does not really begin until we reach the festival.”

Tenzou suppressed the urge to run away.

*...I need to concentrate! Now is the time to concentrate!*

He knew Mary enjoyed the happiness they currently had, but he also knew she felt some dissatisfaction concerning him. On the night that Sanada's Torahide had fallen on them and caused a commotion, she had gotten drunk and made some complaints.

She was happy the way things were and she thought it was good enough, but she still felt some dissatisfaction.

It was a feeling she could not quite put to words.

She had mentioned moving to another room, but that came from her desire to sleep with their futons side by side.

If she did not like sleeping so far apart...

“ ... ”

*The problem is my lack of assertiveness,* thought Tenzou.

On that night, Mary had eventually settled down with her head in his lap and she had not remembered it all the following morning. But he remembered it all quite well, including how she had placed her chest on his head while she was awake.



He felt really bad about it all.

*...Mary-dono is always working so hard at everything.*

Perhaps because she had lived with the assumption of an imminent death, she treasured each and every day. And she tried to experience and gain as much as possible during those days.

In that sense, he did not treat her right.

He was trying to take good care of her, but that was a form of “preservation”, not a means of mutual improvement.

They wanted to be together no matter what it meant for England or the Far East, so they would have to spend their time together in a way that allowed them to hold their heads high when faced with the people they had betrayed.

So he had tried saying it. And Mary had blushed and hung her head.

Tenzou had not been using a ninja technique like Smooth Response or Tasteful Handling. He had tried to invite her in as carefree a way as he could. That was all. However...

*...Incredible.*

Water lilies were blossoming all around Mary.

They were in public and near the others. She must have been embarrassed that everyone could see the flowers that were her emotions because she restlessly tried to brush away the nearby ones. However, they continued to blossom and they began to pile up around her.

All he had done was invite her in public without letting his fear stop him. Was that really enough to make her this happy?

*If so, he thought. This was for the best.*

They had Masazumi and the others for maintaining things between England and the Far East, and they could prepare for battle if need be. Carrying a burden yourself did not mean you could not ask others for help.

They were residents of Musashi.

**10ZO:** “Masazumi-dono, on the topic of national sovereignty, where do the

people fall into the three factors needed to establish a nation?"

**Vice President:** "Judge, they are protected and given a guarantee by the nation's laws and military might. Even when their opponent is something greater than an individual. ...That is why people desire the framework of a nation."

"Judge," replied Tenzou before looking to Mary.

Hanging her head did not hide her blushing or her emotions. She was very different from normal.

"Mary-dono."

When he called out to her, her shoulders finally shook.

"...Y-yes?"

In order to look at him, she lifted her gaze up to around his neck but then stopped.

And he could tell her gaze was dropping back down as if being boiled away.

So he held out his right hand.

"Let's go."

She did not immediately respond. Two and then three seconds passed. The span of a breath passed after that.

*...Th-this silence is saying "I'm sorry!", isn't it!?*

But just as he thought that, Mary suddenly grabbed his proffered right hand between her hands.

She held it tightly.

Her hands were covered in scars which were not immediately noticeable. Those hands and fingers were the proof of her life on England's third and fourth levels and they had cut down three hundred people.

They held his hand as if biting it. It was a desperate grip that was so like her.

And after fully latching onto his hand, she moved her upper body vertically.

"Y-...yes. Judge."

She responded with something of a false start and she no longer tried to stop the scattering flowers.

Tenzou gave her his right hand and lowered his hips slightly.

He picked up the trash bag she had dropped. Or he pretended to. Instead, he pressed his lips against the back of her hand as it held his right hand.

“Ah...”

The flowers blossomed all the more. Tenzou stood up and lifted the trash bag in his left hand.

“How about we get going, Mary-dono?”

Asama watched as the couple formed in England walked off.

Mary held his right hand in her left while her right hand held his arm. As for him...

“—————”

He briefly looked back and nodded.

Once he faced forward again and walked off, everyone else nodded too.

**Mar-Ga:** “...Yes, I understand perfectly. ...You’re saying I can use this in a doujinshi...”

**Gold Mar:** “Tenzou can be really reckless sometimes...”

**Silver Wolf:** “But those times almost all have to do with Mary, don’t they?”

While the wolf breathed a sigh of astonishment and envy, Asama felt a cold sweat in her heart.

*...I look that way too, don’t I?*

*Both of us look just like “a maiden in love”!* she thought about herself and Mary.

This likely applied to Mitotsudaira as well.

However, there was something else that applied to Mary as much as them.

*...Mary also seems to have skipped straight past the romance phase and entered the pure love phase.*

Since Asama and Mitotsudaira had known him for so long, they had not really gone through that phase either.

But it was hitting them now.

Realizing your own or someone else's feelings after the fact was not an easy thing. The rebound from the past was so harsh that she was losing sight of herself.

Of course, there was no need to change the relationship from before.

But she had a choice now that she had realized what a truly happy environment she lived in.

Should she treat him even better than before?

Or should she keep everything the same, hide the happiness in her heart, and trust in their mutual understanding?

She felt that everyone was different, but everyone was a beginner when they first noticed that happiness.

So they would not know what to do about it.

Anxiety and unhappiness could be countered with purification and action. Mary was a well-made girl. She would be able to do the same.

But no one was accustomed to that happiness. When you became old enough to look to your future, you would think your life would end within your current framework.

But that was not necessarily the case.

Your life could also become a life spent with someone else.

And if that happened, that framework was easily broken.

Especially if you made an attempt to change your usual self.

That was true even for Mary who had already been so close to Tenzou. Asama watched those two walking away. Mary was hanging her head and being half-dragged along, but Asama smiled a little.

She tried to say “that can’t be easy”, but different words left her mouth.

“How nice...”

Asama gasped.

*...H-how nice!? What am I saying!?*

She felt like her emotions had been far too honest lately. But if that was the case...

*...Then this isn’t a lie.*

She had thought that things could not be easy for Mary and Tenzou, and that was not a lie. But that was less important.

It could not be easy, but it seemed nice.

“...Wow.”

“Wow what?” asked Mitotsudaira.

*...She heard me!?*

Had she also heard the previous “how nice”?

Asama gave her a hesitant glance and saw Mitotsudaira’s cheeks were red. Past her, the idiot sister kept a straight face while holding a hand to her ear and directing her ear toward Asama, but that girl was abnormal and was best ignored.

Then Mitotsudaira elbowed her right arm.

Asama gave her a questioning look and Mitotsudaira whispered to her with a frown.

“There’s nothing wrong with feeling that way. ...I thought the same thing.”

“H-ho ho?”

This friend did not often offer her raw feelings like this.

So there was something she wanted to say.

“Um, Mito? I kind of want us to die together right here, but can I ask

something?”

“...That is awfully morbid, but what is it?”

“Well.” Asama took a half step toward Mitotsudaira and spoke while still facing forward. “Did you think ‘how nice’ while watching Mary and Tenzou-kun?”

“Judge. I did.”

“And did you also think ‘that can’t be easy’ beforehand?”

“Judge. I did.”

“Then,” said Asama. “If you imagine us in their place, do you think things ‘can’t be easy’ between yourself and Toori-kun?”

...Wow.

Mitotsudaira was hit by a harsh counter.

That was true. When she thought of them in those positions, she did not think it “can’t be easy” like she did when it was someone else.

It was not a burden. Because it was necessary for her.

So when they thought of themselves in Mary’s place, only the “how nice” remained.

She nearly fell to her knees when she realized that.

“Well done...”

Asama had done an impressive job of guiding her here.

*...T-Tomo really is better than me when it comes to using words...!*

Asama had noticed this, so she had dragged Mitotsudaira into it as well.

“Well, um...do you admit defeat?” asked Asama while blushing.

“Wh-why do you sound so victorious!? You stepped on that trap first.”

“Ho ho? So you admit I am ahead of you?”

“That is not something to brag about.”

But at the same time...

“Mary has a ways to go too, doesn’t she?”

While the two of them relaxed their shoulders and watched the couple leave, they heard a voice from behind.

“Heh heh... This is a happy thing for Mary. She doesn’t have to be so obedient anymore.”

“...How long have you been listening in, Kimi?”

“Oh, come now. I wasn’t eavesdropping. ...The voices of defenseless girls just have a way of reaching people’s ears.” Kimi narrowed her eyes. “Aren’t you glad you aren’t such a straitlaced girl anymore?”

“Don’t put it like that...!”

Mitotsudaira gave Asama a sidelong glance to say arguing with Kimi was pointless.

But Kimi was already embracing Horizon from behind.

“Now, then. Horizon, let’s review some data afterwards. We need to submit the results of last night’s photoshoot to have posters printed for the two of us.”

“A-are you making more sexy posters, Kimi!?”

“Oh? It is important that you make sure people can see your best side. That way you know what you need to improve upon.”

Just then, he raised his right hand.

“What’s this about posters?”

“...Huh!?”

Mitotsudaira tilted her head and her crossdressing king eventually did the same.

“I mean, I was cleaning up my room and dead last night.”

*That’s true*, thought Mitotsudaira as she turned toward her friend with a smile.

“Tomo, can you explain?”

**Asama:** “You’re getting back at me, aren’t you!?”

**Silver Wolf:** “I need to take whatever chances I can get...!”

But Asama formed a smile and gestured both hands toward Mitotsudaira.

“Toori-kun, you didn’t see Mito’s new swimsuit last night, did you? Because Horizon knocked you out as soon as you stuck your head in.”

“Yeah, that really shook my brain... Judge, I’d love to see Nate’s new one. The previous one was so cool.”

“Y-you saw the previous one!?”

“Judge. I got quite a few glimpses of it. You’re the designer type, so I bet it’d be interesting to hear where you got the ideas from. And the curves from your waist to your hips are so cool, so I’m sure the new one looks great too. So when I heard you’d show it to me, I had to go check it out.”

...*Wow...*

That was quite the thing to have him say in front of the others. Mitotsudaira thought Asama was going to tease her, but the girl was only blushing, suggesting she had realized the same thing. However...

“M-my king, shouldn’t you ask Horizon about hers?”

“No, no.” Horizon waved her hand side to side. “Mine was chosen by the Blue Thunder’s manager. Yes.”

“Yeah...” Her king hung his head. “I tried asking about that during the study camp.”

“You did?”

“And she said something like ‘I chose it because it was on sale’ while doing an impression of my mom’s voice. I’m not into the real mom genre, so that did a lot of psychological damage...”

Everyone gave him sympathetic looks.

Ookubo did her best to keep smiling in the bathhouse.



Her opponent was Kani Saizou.

Satomi Yoshiyasu would take her side in the discussion here.

Kani and Yoshiyasu were both in their rest periods, so they would not begin fighting right away.

However, Ookubo had an idea.

*...I could always duel Kani.*

Kani had to be the easiest opponent in Odawara right now.

She had lost some of her weapons in the fight against Mogami Yoshiaki. According to her: “Testament. Four of my ejection cowlings were destroyed!”

*It’s always worth asking, isn’t it?* Ookubo had thought.

Based on what she had seen of the battle held on the Odawara rooftops, Kani had eight ejection spears.

If she had lost four of those, her ability to fight would have been halved.

It was hard to tell why she remained in Odawara. Was she just an idiot, or was she making a proper assessment of her strength? Ookubo could only guess at Hashiba’s decisions here, but since Kani had not been ordered to retreat, it was best to assume the girl could still fight.

*...This must not be enough to bring her power down.*

But losing half her equipment had to make her feel at a disadvantage.

So Ookubo suggested a different form of competition.

“We will have a karaoke competition.”

The next step was to not let Kani question it or run away.

Ookubo ordered some food from an automaton, both to fill up the girl’s rest period and to recover from her own exhaustion.

Kani had apparently brought some light snacks with her, but...

“You sure are ordering a lot...!”

“Yes, this is for you as well. ...Feel free to eat as much as you want. The Siege

of Odawara includes the history recreation of a festival held by the Hashiba forces. And if we're going to do karaoke, it's best to set the mood."

"Oh, but I can't pay you back...!"

"Don't worry." Ookubo smiled toward Kani and waved her hand dismissively. "I'm participating in the Siege of Odawara as Musashi's Representative Council Head. I will be reimbursed for most any expenses and, when you're ordered to fight on the battlefield, you deserve to treat yourself a little bit, don't you think? Also..."

Also...

"If you eat and drink on our yen, it means you had Musashi spend more of our budget. Should a member of the Hashiba forces really reject an offer like that?"

"When you put it like that, no!"

Yoshiyasu was silently glaring at Ookubo.

Ookubo operated the ordering sign frame and smiled as she typed on the keyboard of another sign frame.

**Nagaya-Stable:** "You don't have to give me that look. Just leave it all to me."

**Righteousness:** "Sorry. ...To be honest, I'm terrible at this kind of thing. I'm impressed at how easy you make it look."

**Nagaya-Stable:** "I appreciate that you don't take issue with people who can do this. Also..."

Also...

**Nagaya-Stable:** "This is entirely ineffectual against the awful people 'above' us."

"Yeah," said Yoshiyasu out loud while looking away, so Ookubo elbowed her in the bathwater. Kani had tilted her head at the girl's reaction.

"Did you order some kind of weird joke food!?"

"Eh? Um, yes. Look forward to it."

She could not lie, so Ookubo ordered something along those lines.

*...The crocodile steak with bananas should be safe enough...*

With that, they would have enough food. That left the drinks.

“Kani-kun. Can you handle alcohol?”

“Testament! I can!”

*That’s what I like to hear.*

She had guts to drink alcohol in the bath before some karaoke.

For herself, Ookubo decided to go with a strawberry lassi she could pretend was alcoholic. It was an option for the mixed drinks, so Kani would have no way of knowing whether or not it had alcohol in it.

And for Yoshiyasu...

**Nagaya-Stable:** “I hear you can’t hold your liquor.”

**Righteousness:** “I can hold it just fine...! It’s just that I keep getting served really strong drinks!”

That was a new one.

But Ookubo did not want to make an enemy here, so arguing would be a bad idea.

“Fair enough,” was all she said while ordering Yoshiyasu’s drink.

**Nagaya-Stable:** “I’ll order you an umeshu with super low alcohol content. ... You can claim it’s to recover from your exhaustion and get some nutrients.”

**Righteousness:** “Thanks. At this time of year, it’ll either have just started steeping or be from last year.”

Ookubo was reminded of umeshu with a steeped and falling-apart plum in it. When pouring umeshu, it was important to strain out the pieces, and she gulped a bit at the thought.

She reviewed the main order while wishing she had gone with umeshu herself.

*...I already ordered the sub order, so it should be arriving soon.*

It did.

The door slid open and a bathhouse-equipped automaton walked in with a tray. It carried some light appetizers.

The automatons would treat the fighters like they did not exist, but that apparently changed when they were customers.

“Now,” said Ookubo while leaning her back against the edge of the bath. “Let’s eat and enjoy ourselves until the main order arrives.”

She closed her wings.

Those six golden wings were below the eaves on the road. Katou Yoshiaki inserted a coin into a vending machine and thought about what she should get to stay hydrated. She viewed the options before her eyes and, since this was Houjou, they had an incredible number of curry flavors.

“Right now, this sports nectar is probably better than the black tea or carbonated lassi. Although it looks fairly thick. ...But before that, it seems it is time to battle.”

She turned to her right.

“I will make up for falling into the red earlier.”

Musashi’s merchant was there.

*...I see.*

Yoshiaki took a breath and nodded.

“Just to be clear, I am part of the Houjou forces here, not the Hashiba ones. So keep that in mind.”

“Then this will kill two birds with one stone.”

*I don’t like that interpretation,* thought Yoshiaki, but she kept it to herself.

Clashing with someone else’s assertions was such a pain. And the duel would settle everything either way.

She knew Musashi’s merchant had fought and lost to Date. Date would work with Musashi for a long time to come, so if Musashi had given a victory’s worth of rights to them...

*...They could have more and more taken in the long term.*

As a merchant, he had to make back what he had lost. It would likely be best to fight Date again and win this time, but he could never recover if he lost again.

He must have wanted a different opponent as a safety measure.

And that opponent was her.

She knew what his choice meant. His mention of killing two birds with one stone explained everything.

She belonged to Hashiba, but she counted as Houjou here. Defeating her would not earn them rights from both Hashiba and Houjou, but it would make it look like Musashi had defeated both nations.

He thought he could make up for his loss against Date and earn something extra while he was at it.

“Do you know the difference between a merchant and a gambler?” she asked.

“Whether or not they prostrate.”

How was she supposed to respond when he said that with a straight face? But regardless...

“A gambler keeps shoving more money into a game they can’t win.”

“That is not a gambler.”

“Yes, it’s a loser.”

The merchant’s eyebrows moved in response to that. And he opened his mouth.

“And if I win in the end?”

“Is fantasizing about a bright future enough for you?”

Just as she asked that, the merchant flicked some kind of power from his hand.

It was a 100-yen coin. It flew toward her in a high-speed straight line.

*...He’s faster than I imagined...*

It reached her in an instant.

“So the Treasurer has engaged the enemy,” said Futayo in front of the festival stands built on a hill.

She held a sign frame alerting her of a battle request. Masazumi asked her a question about it.

“Is that a report from Bertoni?”

Futayo looked at the sign frame by her hands.

A brief report on battle information was generally sent to the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor first. However...

“I prefer to leave all the thinking to you, Masazumi, so any reports should be sent to you at the same time as me.”

“Then he must still be fighting. After how quick his previous fight was, I thought this one might be the same.”

Masazumi looked toward Odawara.

“His opponent is Houjou, so I’d really like for you to give us a win here, Bertoni.”

Shirojiro saw the enemy’s response and movement.

Yoshiaki defended against the coin bullet he had launched. And she used...

“A sheet of metal...? No, an armor panel?”

She had ejected a panel of metal from the air. It was about 20cm wide and 1m long.

The panel floated in midair alongside her arm as she turned her right side forward in a guarding stance.

Then she stood up from her low, crouching stance. The metal panel circled around her and came to a stop near the back of her waist.

He could tell this used gravitational control.

And she swung her right arm.

Ether light sprayed out as she ejected something at her hand.

It was a large white blade shaped like a chisel.

The blade portion was thin and long. The flat chisel sword grew to about 4m long. It had a white luster to it and it floated in her hand.

“Carve him...Weiss Fürstin.”

Just as she said that, something shot from atop the blade in her hand.

*...What is that!?*

Shirojiro took a defensive stance right before it collided with him.

It was a direct hit.

*...Did that get through?*

Yoshiaki spun around the blade that had fired a rapid shot.

She had launched a single coin past the thin mist created by the high-speed shot.

It was a Groschen silver coin. It was growing outdated, but it was equivalent to a Far Eastern 500-yen coin. It was thick for a coin, which gave it a lot of destructive power. It was primarily used as an armor-piercing anti-ship round.

She had used one of those on the enemy.

The shock of impact had created a cloud of dust where the Musashi Treasurer had been.

But Yoshiaki saw something.

“I would expect no less from a merchant with an Urban Name...!”

The Musashi Treasurer was there.

He had caught the silver coin in his outstretched right hand.

But he had not stopped that 500 yen barehanded.

He had used money.

There was a stack of coins in his palm.

“These are 100-yen coins.”

He did not even glance at the coin as it fell from his hand to the ground.

“If it is currency, the god of money can exchange it for an equivalent value. By touching my money, it became my possession, so your silver coin was exchanged for my five 100-yen coins.”

One, two, three – the falling silver coins had something in common.

They had become no more than round and flat pieces of metal.

Yoshiaki tilted her head when she saw it.

“If it was an exchange, shouldn’t that money come to me? I thought this was an equivalent exchange.”

“You consumed its value by firing it.”

“...So you overwrote its existence as money and consumed it using the power of your god?”

“Judge.” He nodded and held up the fourth coin before it could fall. “And that leaves only these plain coins. You are really meant to spend a little extra to ensure the used coins can be used again. But...”

He threw away the fourth coin as he spoke.

“I cannot spare that money at the moment.”

“Because you’re poor?”

“I am not poor.” He squeezed her silver coin in his hand. “I simply have no money...!”

*I don’t care how forcefully you claim there’s a difference,* thought Yoshiaki as the Musashi Treasurer raised his hands.

He spread his hands like he was drawing a bow and several acceleration spells activated.

“Let us end this in a single blow.”

“Because you’re short on money?”

“No. ...I tried to do my best earlier and failed. A simple battle is better.”



It happened just as he said “so”.

“Go, kickback...!”

An impressive water vapor explosion occurred at the Musashi Treasurer’s hands.

The enemy had fired a coin bullet with multiple acceleration spells. Which was...

*...The same technique he used against Tres España’s Vice Chancellor during the Armada battle...!*

Yoshiaki did not hesitate. She could not capture the approaching coin bullet. However...

*...I can read its path...!*

This used acceleration spells.

Several of them were lined up in a row.

They formed a perfectly-aligned row in order to provide the coin with speed directed straight ahead.

So if they only looked like a single acceleration spell, you were in the target location.

She did not use her own eyes to search for that.

“...Weiss Fürstin!”

Yoshiaki opened a Magie Figur. The enemy’s acceleration spells were visible to the naked eye. She had Weiss Fürstin recognize those spell *lernen figurs* and opened a sight-linking system.

She set Weiss Fürstin’s autopilot to fire a counterattack once the spell *lernen figurs* overlapped perfectly.

*...Will it be fast enough!?*

It all happened in an instant. And she heard a sudden but quiet sound.

It was the soft knocking sound of a targeting lock.

This would work.

But then Yoshiaki saw Weiss Fürstin's counterattack location displayed on her Magie Figur.

*...It's right on my centerline!*

That was dangerous. The enemy had targeted a location that was difficult to dodge no matter which way she moved her body.

It was a shifted up toward her chest a bit, so he may have predicted she would fly.

She sensed his intent to prevent her from escaping. And...

"...!"

Something else from the Musashi Treasurer flew over her head.

They were ten 10-yen coins.

He had made change using a distribution spell.

That meant it had originally been a 100-yen coin. If that was flying in now, he must have set it up earlier.

*...When did he do that...?*

She could make a guess.

When he had caught her silver coin, he had used 100-yen coins.

If he had defended with the concept of equivalent value, he would have used five coins. But he had given his explanation after raising the fourth coin.

Where had the fifth one gone? Now she knew.

The enemy had paid for insurance on the final coin and recycled it.

He sent a cluster of 10-yen coins from the sky when she could not fly or dodge. And from ahead...

"———!"

The recycled Groschen silver coin flew toward the center of her body.

There were multiple actions.

The first was Yoshiaki swinging her bullet-accelerator blade in front of her body.

But not even that accelerator could send the high-speed bullet back the way it had come.

So she did something else.

She rotated the blade.

But this was not a normal rotation. The blade itself drew a U-shaped path in the air.

“Spin around, Weiss Fürstin!”

The scraping of the bullet created a burst of sparks as the blade spun around.

She used that arcing path as the margin and supplied the rest of the rotation speed with...

“Fire!”

Yoshiaki had placed a 500-yen coin on the blade. The gravitational control used to fire it repelled the coin perpendicularly instead of letting it slide down the blade. The recoil spun the blade with the force of a ricochet.

“—————!”

It rotated in front of Yoshiaki as she took a step back.

The enemy’s bullet was scooped up by Weiss Fürstin’s blade, changing its trajectory.

And its path was bent all the way around to send it back the way it had come.

Immediately afterwards, Yoshiaki swung both arms toward the cluster of 10-yen coins dropping from the sky.

“Weiss Fürstin!”

Ten blades were ejected into the air.

All of the coins were caught and rotated. And at the center of them all, Yoshiaki looked forward.

She faced the merchant who had launched his acceleration spells and closed his hands.

“Fire....!”

The silver coin already had the force of the enemy’s acceleration spells and the firing of her blade was added on top of that.

She also redirected the 10 shots from the sky.

“Go!”

She released them all.

“Oh?” said Narumi just as she was preparing to pay her bill.

She heard a familiar sound from the distance outside.

*...That was the Treasurer’s cannon blast.*

But the sound overlapping it was odd.

It was almost familiar but not quite. If anything, it reminded her of...

*...The 4th Special Duty Officer’s gravitational acceleration ejection pattern?*

The Musashi Treasurer’s opponent was Katou Yoshiaki, a Weiss Hexen. So...

“A close-range artillery battle? Talk about reckless.”

“Hm?”

Mogami Yoshiaki turned toward her while drinking sake at the table.

She tilted her head but narrowed her eyes.

“Very noisy, isn’t it?”

“Judge. But it will prove fruitful. ...For one of them.”

“Your bill will be 2700 yeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeen!”

Narumi sighed as she pulled exact change from her wallet and placed it in Ujiteru’s hand.

“I need to fight my next duel too.”

Just as she said that, she heard another solid sound from outside.

“Was that...?”

It was a familiar but loud noise.

Yoshiaki watched her attack.

She had honestly not needed much accuracy from the ten shots she redirected from the sky. She had only wanted them to hold her opponent in place.

But they tore through the enemy’s surroundings before the real attack arrived.

The cluster of 10-yen coins exploded near the Musashi Treasurer.

The blasts reverberated out and dust sprayed high into the air.

Meanwhile, the Musashi Treasurer had his hands thrust forward on either side of him.

Was he preparing a wide-range defense?

But the bombing had come from above.

One of them was in position to pass diagonally through his face. If it hit, it would blow a hole through his head below the forehead.

And...

“—————”

He dodged with no more than swinging his head to the side.

Of course, that was not quite enough to fully dodge it.

The coin diagonally grazed his cheek and some of his hair scattered through the air.

But that was all. The Musashi Treasurer had not moved.

...*Why not?*

Yoshiaki had sent the silver coin right back toward him.

So why had he not used his body to dodge it already?

She did not know. So she quickly pulled back the ten blades scattered overhead and focused on the Musashi Treasurer's actions.

She had trained her eyes for firing and aerial battles and she used that to accurately view his movements.

*...Is that...?*

The right hand he had spread out for defense was thrust out in front of his chest.

Of course, there was no way that was enough to catch the high-speed silver coin.

Besides, there were no defensive coins in his hand.

But she had seen something else.

"...An acceleration spell!"

The Musashi Treasurer had opened a spell *lernen figur* in his palm.

And that was not all.

The vermilion light her eyes sensed did not come from his hand.

It was larger but hidden.

"Don't tell me..."

It came from behind him.

He had spread his arms and thrust them forward earlier, but there had been acceleration spell *lernen figurs* behind them.

It was an arc circling behind him. Countless acceleration spells were arranged behind his back in great enough numbers to reach from his right hand to his left.

He had already prepared that many acceleration spells.

He was likely in the midst of stopping her counterattack. He had taken a defensive stance to hide the acceleration spells behind him.

And he had not refrained from moving his body to dodge because he could

not let her see them.

His actions had come from a focus on winning.

It was a gamble that erased the fear that she would catch on and respond with some kind of countermeasure.

But he had won that gamble. And his expression had remained stony throughout.

*...That would be where he got the Urban Name of Ice Face!*

The rest only took an instant.

The acceleration spells split and the silver coin flew behind him.

After a series of solid sounds and spraying ether light, the Musashi Treasurer swung his left hand forward.

With vermilion light spilling from his left hand, he created an exit to the acceleration spells prepared behind him.

He had established an unbroken path of speed.

“If I am to make money, I cannot sell victory to you. So...”

She heard his voice.

“I will repay you...!”

After its second and third round of acceleration, the shot broke the sound barrier when it was launched.

Shirojiro could tell the fingers of his outthrust left hand had split.

There was no blood yet because a vacuum had formed. The nails were broken, but...

“...!”

He placed his right hand over his left. He had been supplied with a healing spell when he left for the battlefield, so he could place the divine protection on his left arm without it feeling like a waste of money.

A moment later, a water vapor explosion occurred at the leading edge of the

acceleration and the surrounding heat and moisture were blown away.

As the silver coin split the air, it flew toward the enemy as if repelled.

It targeted Katou Yoshiaki.

She was one of the Ten Spears that Hashiba had prepared to oppose Musashi.  
Was her number 4?

If he could defeat one of them, it would be...

*...Three birds with one stone!*

He scolded himself for only realizing that now.

Lately, he had gotten carried away and screwed up some business deals.

A lot of money had been changing hands to guarantee Musashi's finances, but it had been a mistake to try to supply Musashi's repair materials in order to line his pockets.

Since they were fighting a war, he had worked behind the scenes at buying repair materials for cheap, but when he started having Musashi, the academy, and the Asama Shrine acquire such things, they had begun making changes for the Musashi Mk. 2.

The materials he had prepared were for the old model and they became a liability. He had made the transactions using a secret second account book, so it automatically counted as embezzlement and, as a result, he had sold vegetables.

But this would bring all that to an end. This opponent counted as both Houjou and Hashiba.

"Transaction complete."

Shirojiro opened his right hand. In the wind, he swung his left hand and snapped the fingers.

"We have the money back, Heidi...!"

With that, he turned his back on his opponent.

Just then, he heard the loud sound of the bullet reaching her.



It was the ring of a direct hit. However, it was...

“...Far away?”

Sensing something was off, Shirojiro looked back.

Yoshiaki was standing a mere 10 meters away.

Or she had been.

But she was no longer there.

*...Did she run away?*

No. She was there. He could see her six golden wings.

But she was not 10 meters away.

She was much more distant. She was at the very end of the road they stood on.

That was a distance of 500 meters.

“Huh...?”

The answer to his vocalized question mark was obvious.

Yoshiaki’s entire body moved as she gasped for breath and she held something under her arm.

It was a *schale besen*.

The thruster nozzle was aimed his way and he recognized that stance.

It was the same one Naito used in the gunner mode that was Schwarz Techno’s greatest attack.

She would load a bullet into the broom’s brush and then fire it.

His enemy was in that exact same stance. So...

*...That loud noise...*

It had not been the ring of a direct hit. It was the ring of the enemy firing.

Yoshiaki felt a cold sweat covering her body.

She had constructed Weiss Fürstin's foundation just before a direct hit from the Musashi Treasurer's attack.

She had been right to pull back the ten blades she had ejected into the air.

She could not have used them to fly, but she had successfully built the engine that provided acceleration.

And there was a reason she had managed to do it instantaneously.

"Thank you, Weiss Fürstin..."

After all...

"Weiss Fürstin is a *schale besen* constructed using gravitational control. And it uses spell composition, so the engine does not use any bolts."

It was like origami or a 3D puzzle. The main long blades were necessary, but the other parts had specialized roles and no rated value.

Each individual part had a program applied via magic, so while they all combined to form a gravitational thruster, they could also become a controller or armor.

Just now, she had used the bare minimum of parts to build an acceleration system.

She knew Zwei Fürstin could break the sound barrier in just over three seconds.

But what about with only the thruster?

The result was her own survival.

She had produced an explosion of instantaneous acceleration, connected the acceleration gears, and blocked the enemy's coin bullet with the nozzle.

But she had not stopped the enemy bullet inside the *schale besen*.

She had added thruster settings to each of Weiss Fürstin's parts and swung it around at high speed.

She gave it a 360-degree rotation.

In the end, that re-aimed the nozzle toward the enemy.

If she fired like this, she could fire back at the Musashi Treasurer with even more acceleration placed on top of his.

“But I won’t do that.”

Yoshiaki pulled out what was in her right hand.

It was a roll of Groschen silver coins.

Converted into Far Eastern terms, it was a total of 10,000 yen. She shoved them into the muzzle as it spun around.

“...Herrlich!!”

She fired the bottom end of the coin roll.

The silver coin, that had been super-accelerated by Weiss Techno, struck the coin roll offering like the hammer of a gun.

And the coin roll shot out with the force of a ricochet.

The explosion of air blew away four of the blades forming the barrel.

But the projectile had indeed taken flight.

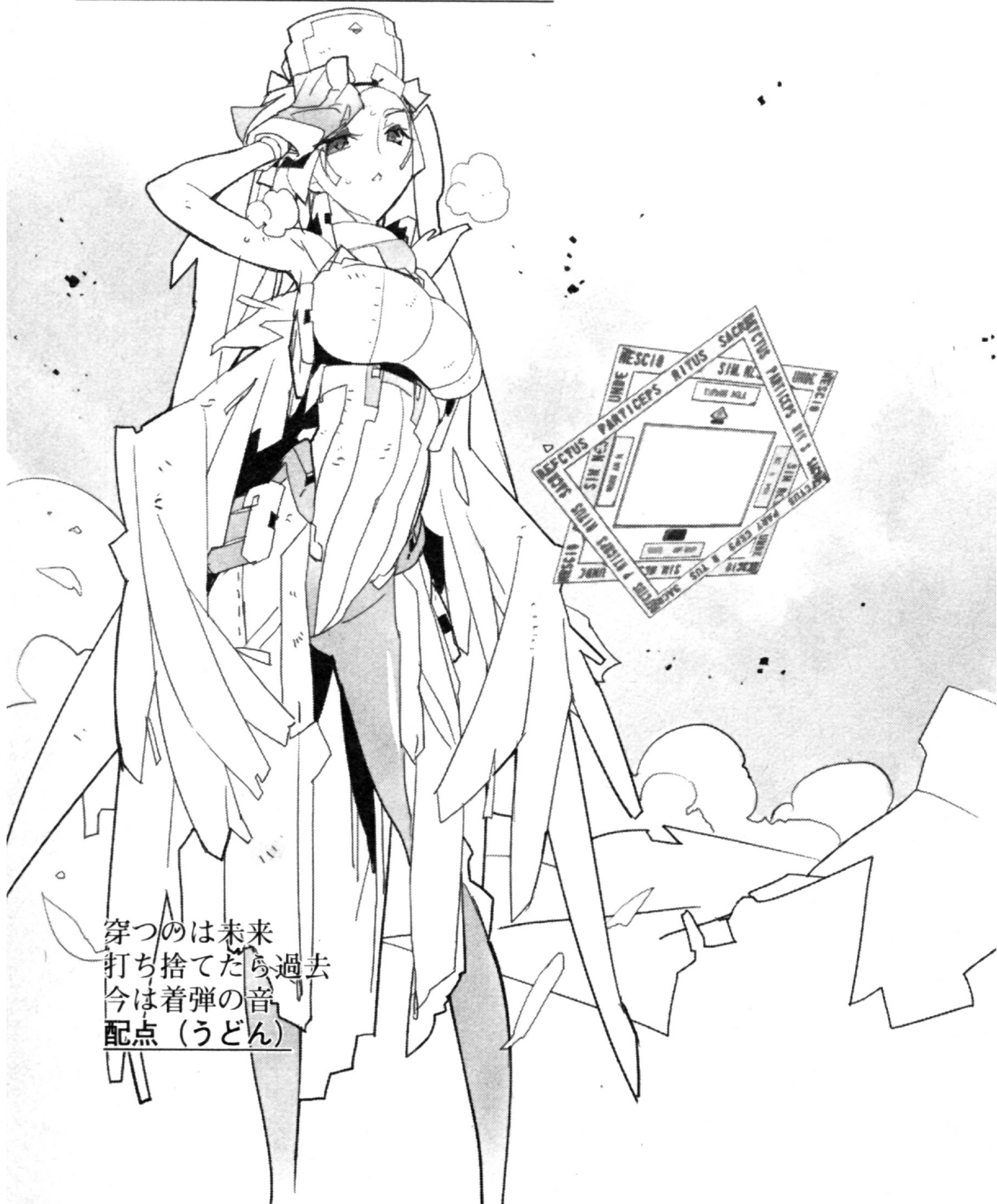
Yoshiaki saw the destination of the blast: the Musashi Treasurer.

It was a direct hit.

# **Chapter 56: Clever Girl on the Chopping Block**

# 第五十六章

## 『叩き台の手取娘』



穿つのは未来  
打ち捨てたら過去  
今は着弾の音  
配点 (うどん)

*You strike the future*

*Abandon it and it becomes the past*

*The sound of a hit fills the present*

### **Point Allocation (Udon)**

The Musashi group at the elevated festival could see the straight line of destruction in the Odawara city.

For a few hundred meters in that distant city, the rows of houses were smashed and the straw of their thatched roofs was blasted into the air.

The cloudy sky echoed with the sounds of breaking wood and the reverberation of household belongings rolling and scattering.

“Oh, the result is in.”

While standing below a pine tree on the hill, Masazumi looked at the displayed text.

She compared the report written there with the destruction in Odawara.

“Augesvarer.”

“Eh!? What is it!? Are you going to give me money!?”

“Face reality. ...You’re one step closer to making some udon.”

“Wow!” Augesvarer smiled and clasped her hands together. “There’s a way to escape this, right!? Right!?”

“I’m glad to see you can remain positive, but you’re going to have to do what you have to do. Also, it seems Bertoni is actually still alive.”

“Eh?” Balfette pointed at the Odawara city. “He survived that?”

“Judge. He’s injured, but he apparently used most of his money on defense.”

“Wow, I just checked and we only have 130 yen left! Shiro-kun, you don’t deserve to live!”

Was his safety or the money more important to her?

*...Probably the money...*

*In a way, she makes it seem more real than he does,* thought Masazumi.

*But,* she thought to change her focus. She could hear the secondary damages of houses collapsing under their own weight and the household belongings scattering around.

*...Augesvarer does have a point.*

Just like she said, if he was broke and injured...

“Should we have him withdraw...?”

Katou Yoshiaki saw the confirmation of the duel result on her Magie Figur.

She took a breath and wiped away the sweat.

She made sure Weiss Fürstin’s parts were stored in their phase space, but...

“Oh?”

For some reason, the previous impact was preventing the storage spell from functioning properly. The parts must have bent because there was a problem with the spell information.

Thus, she activated it with emergency settings. She set it to forced storage mode and shoved the parts into the space.

Then she looked to the destruction in the distance.

“...We can do it.”

They could stop Musashi.

Of course, the Musashi Treasurer could not use near-unlimited money at the moment. This victory was an imperfect victory, just like Fukushima’s initial victory over the Musashi Vice Chancellor. However...

“Fukushima taught us what that means.”

They could not view that as a victory. They had to look at it differently: “We can do it.”

She could not see the Musashi Treasurer at the other end of the street.

It did not seem he had decided to withdraw yet, but he had not escaped that unharmed. So...

“We can already win when the conditions are right. And you should eventually be within reach.”

Yoshiaki looked up into the cloudy sky.

She spoke into those heavens that had yet to clear up.

“I hope that ‘eventually’ is sooner rather than later.”

She lowered her gaze to the *lernen figur* displaying the result, but she did not announce her withdrawal.

The rest period lasted an hour. It would be useful to use that time to monitor the actions in Odawara and she wanted some time to rest as well. Instead of rushing, she needed to make use of her time. And...

*...What is Kani doing?*

She had recently finished a reckless battle against Mogami Yoshiaki, but...

“A karaoke competition? She is having a crazy time for her first battle...”

Ookubo sensed danger within the bath.

*...This is not good...*

She kept a smile on her face, but things were bad. As for where the threat was found...

*...The Satomi Student Council President can't hold her liquor at all.*

You could not even blame it on her being tired.

Ookubo had never before seen someone get drunk after two or three sips of super-weak umeshu.

It seemed pretty dangerous for a politician to have no alcohol tolerance whatsoever.

But at the same time, Kani was incredible.

Even though she had been soaking in the bath for a while, she downed the



drinks like they were water. Ookubo ordered some stronger drinks to try to take her out, but...

“Oh, this is really sweet! What a weird flavor!”

*...That’s a strong Russian drink...*

It was meant to get demons drunk and raise their body temperature in that frigid region. But when that girl drank it...

“There’s this tight feeling in my mouth! Thank you very much! ...Oh, you can really taste these vegetables after the drink!”

“You’re really familiar with the etiquette for drinking.”

“Testament! My dad, mom, grandfather, and grandmother are all drinkers! I learned the different flavors by spending time with all of them!”

*So she had a quadruple gifted education?*

Part of this would be inherited from her family, but hopefully it was not at four times the intensity.

And Ookubo’s protector was about as effective a shield as a piece of paper. When she glanced over at Yoshiyasu...

“Ahh...”

The swimsuit-wearing girl was resting her head on the edge of the bath. She had a towel folded up and covering her eyes to hide her expression, but...

“Um! Is the Satomi Student Council President not feeling well!?”

“Well, um, she, uh...”

Ookubo thought about it and realized she had seen something similar before.

“Are you familiar with the Satomi clan’s facial care treatments?”

“No, I’m not!”

*Neither am I.* But Kani sounded interested.

“But I did see it on our divine monitor once! They cover their face, don’t they!?”

“Eh? Yes, um, they do.”

Ookubo nodded and unfolded the towel so it covered Yoshiyasu's whole face.

The hot and damp towel clung to her face and rose and fell over her mouth as she breathed.

*...I'm not trying to assassinate the Satomi Student Council President here, am I?*

*Well, it doesn't matter. This is a dangerous situation and dealing with that takes precedence.*

If Kani realized that one of them was nothing but a burden, her response to them might change.

And regardless of what she herself intended, she could receive instructions from Houjou or Hashiba.

Especially if that Ootani learned of the situation. As a program, he might insist Kani take the optimal action.

*I need to be careful,* thought Ookubo.

Ootani was lying down in his Mouse form.

He was on top of the embankment by the ocean.

"It's so boring on my own..."

He still needed about 10 hours before he recovered from his damage.

Until then, he had to stay put and leave everything to the ether fuel sent from the ley lines and his self-cleaning function.

He could not join the duels, there was no one else here, and he had no hobbies.

All he could do was sleep.

The commentary being sent from Odawara told him that Yoshiaki had defeated the Musashi Treasurer and Kani was engaging a Musashi fighter in a karaoke competition. Part of him wanted to protest risking national interests on karaoke, but he was in his Mouse form, Kani was fighting for Houjou right now, you could say this was a classy thing if you thought of it like the old poetry

competitions, and...

“I suppose anything can be a good experience.”

That was his conclusion.

But he was still bored. He did have some snacks for ether lifeforms that the two Technohexen had left for him, but...

*...Were they trying to be nice when they left ones shaped like bones and bundles of straw?*

*What do they think I am?* he wondered just before he sensed a presence.

He looked up to find a cat.

It was the one that the Technohexen had been loving on the day before.

He gave a bitter “heh” of laughter, got up, and faced the cat.

“What? Are you all alone too?”

His full body was immediately hit by a cat slap from the right.

It happened so casually that not even Ootani managed to react.

By the time he gasped, he had fallen from the embankment and started rolling along the ground.

After three rotations, he scrambled to his feet.

“Y-you damn feline...!”

It had circled behind him. By the time he gasped again, a cat hammer had slammed down on him from above, pushed him to the ground, and started repeatedly striking him.

“Ah, wait, dammit! Don’t use me as a scratching board! Stop, wait, ahhhhh!? I’m supposed to be monitoring things in Odawara!! You damn feliiiiiiiiine!!!!”

*We are being monitored after all,* thought Ookubo while sensing the danger of the situation.

This duel would influence the actions of nations.

She had requested the duel, but she had yet to specify a location. But once it began, that would be made known as well.

She had to do something about Yoshiyasu before then.

Of course, she did not have any sobering spells with her. The best she had was one to accelerate the metabolism, which would cause the girl to break down the alcohol more quickly.

She wanted to come up with another idea, but Kani would notice if she tried anything. So...

*...I guess I'll go ask at the attendant's booth.*

They were sure to have something to help overheated customers.

So first she had to withdraw to the changing room and that required an excuse to leave the bath area.

"I'm going to go place another order. Kani-kun, is there anything you would like?"

"Eh? Can't you use that menu *lernen figur*?"

She was unexpectedly sharp.

*...If I said there's a secret menu, she'd probably come with me.*

So Ookubo smiled bitterly and shook her hand back and forth.

"I drank a lot, remember? I'm going to fix my makeup while I'm at it."

"Ah! I see! ...Good luck!!"

*...With what?*

She stood up. She had a habit of placing her towel over her prosthetic left arm, but she was not trying to hide it. The prosthetic was just good for holding a towel. She smiled bitterly at that excuse.

*...I can be so stubborn even with myself.*

With that thought, she dried off a bit and moved to the changing room.

*I haven't been to a public bath in so long,* thought Ookubo in the chilly

changing room.

Her home was a mansion on the surface level, so it had its own bath. Her grandfather always took his bath first, but since she also had work to do, she generally did not take her bath until late at night.

It was unusual for her to take a bath at this time.

*...Speaking of unusual things since arriving in Odawara, I don't often duel people either.*

*This city is full of rarities,* she thought while operating a sign frame to open a locker to her left. She pulled out her wallet and put on a stole so she would not get too cold.

The attendant's booth was near the entrance on the left. It was a counter that looked like a hole opened in the wall. The changing room had rental tables for playing shogi or chess and you could even do some cooking in the back.

Ookubo asked a question of the automaton standing behind the counter.

"Excuse me. ...Do you have any spells or whatever for sobering someone up?"

"———"

There were two automatons behind the counter and the one out front ignored her. The one behind that moved. However, she also ignored Ookubo, stayed out of the other automaton's way, and moved straight toward the very back of the counter area.

Ookubo nodded once while still being ignored.

"Please. How much does it cost?"

At the same time, she leaped to the left.

That decision proved to be a good one.

A blade stabbed straight into the spot she had just vacated.

"...!"

It was an enemy.

Ookubo's bare feet sounded on the floor as she kept her balance.

Someone was hidden behind the counter.

The blade that swung from behind cover was a wakizashi-class double-edged knife. The thick blade was meant for use against demons or small dragons.

She managed to identify the wielder's uniform by the sleeve visible on the arm swinging the long knife.

"Hexagone Française. ...You're Seki Masasada, aren't you!?"

Seki was surprised by the enemy's decision.

*...What incredible intuition...!*

After losing sight of Yoshiaki, she had set her sights on Ookubo. The girl's position had been readily apparent with Ujiteru and Genan in pursuit and a few other conditions had aligned to make sniping look like a good bet at first.

But then the Satomi Student Council President had arrived.

She had saved Ookubo from Seki's sniper shot and sheltered her in the bathhouse.

Seki had known Kani was already in the bathhouse.

There was no reason to target Ookubo if Kani would defeat her.

She had considered searching for another opponent, but Mouri Terumoto wanted results from Houjou and Musashi.

Houjou had already had Genan drop out of the fight.

Ujiteru must have had some kind of idea because he had not done anything even after his rest period ended. He was working at a café and creating an unprecedented situation where "automaton Houjou Ujiteru is cooking soba in a maid uniform", but since participants would gather there during their break periods, it was hard to make an attack.

Houjou also had Kotarou and Ujinao, but those two had gone to their base at Odawara Castle and were best left to the Reine des Garous.

As for Musashi, the curry boy had decided to withdraw and the merchant boy had been defeated by Hashiba.

That meant Seki had to go after Ookubo. The girl was a good opponent for her in a few different ways.

But if she was defeated by Kani, it would waste a lot of time and she might even withdraw.

Seki had wanted to end this with a sniper shot, but if she stayed put in a sniping position, another participant might attack her.

*...So I decided to enter the bathhouse.*

“Well done.”

How had Ookubo sensed she was hiding there?

Seki felt like her timing had been poor, but it really just meant her opponent was better than her.

In that case, there was no point in hiding.

She nodded and used a *signe cadre* to report the beginning of the battle. She was really supposed to do that before starting, but the first attack had been meaningless anyway. She thought of it as a greeting.

“Here I go.”

Ookubo forcibly swallowed a heavy breath.

She was panicking on the inside. She forced her body to move as it tried to tense up and she started by opening a locker.

She did not have time to put on her clothes, but she could grab the two swords she normally wore at her hip.

She grabbed the stockers that doubled as large and small scabbards and she felt the weight of the weapons in her hands.

The sense of the metal did a lot to calm her heart. Then she started sweating.

*...That was way too close...*

She had noticed Seki due to something seeming ever-so-slightly off.

There had been two automatons behind the counter: one in front and one

behind.

They had ignored her because of the rules of this battle.

But if she ordered some medicine, they would ignore her but still bring the medicine to the counter. Instead of serving her the medicine, they would effectively grab some medicine and place it on the counter for no real reason.

So the rear automaton had started to fulfill her request.

She had walked to the back of the counter area to grab the sobering spell or whatever it would have been.

However, Ookubo had sensed something odd in that movement.

The automaton had stayed out of the other automaton's way and moved straight toward the very back of the counter area.

*...That's the kitchen entrance.*

They would not keep a spell or medicine in the kitchen.

Something like that would be kept on the shelves to either side of the kitchen entrance.

And automatons always took the optimal action.

If they had a destination, they would take the shortest route there.

But this automaton had walked straight back instead of diagonally to the left or right.

If the medicine had been on the right, she would have walked diagonally to the right.

If the medicine had been on the left, she would have walked diagonally to the left.

*In that case, thought Ookubo. Someone had to be behind the counter on the left.*





世鬼・政定

Someone, that is, who the automaton was ignoring but had to avoid.

In other words, an enemy.

That instantaneous decision led to the present situation.

“Kh...”

Ookubo breathed in to regather her body’s strength.

In that instant, someone moved up onto the counter as if sliding on their belly.

It was Seki. She held a pistol in each hand, both aimed at Ookubo.

Ookubo took action the moment she saw the glint of black metal. She moved forward.

“—————!”

Gunshots rang out.

Kani soaked in the bath while watching a recording of her battle on a *lernen figur*.

The footage was focused on her during the battle. It was a program she had installed on the *lernen figurs* she used for acceleration spells and other spells and the footage would often be fragmentary, but it followed her throughout.

She would use the recording for simulations and training later and it was much more complete once she started ejecting the spears. That was because the *lernen figurs* used to control the eight spears were recording her. And as she watched that...

...*Wow, this is embarrassing...!*

She was often shown footage of her training. That way she could check to see if she was moving like she wanted and locate any mistakes or flaws.

But an actual battle was different.

The camera’s “eye” moved based on her actions, so the image swung all over the place and her movements would not settle down. Based on her best from

training, she had surpassed her normal momentum, but her accuracy had dropped to about 70%.

It was her first time on the battlefield, she had been up against a powerful enemy, and she had been pressed for time – a number of excuses came to mind, but as she watched the rough footage...

*...I'm just inexperienced...!*

She had wanted to do her best during the battle against Yoshiaki and this let her review how well she had done.

However, there was one thing missing from this footage: sound.

Ahead and to her left, Yoshiyasu remained motionless while performing her facial care treatment.

Kani was trying to watch the footage without Yoshiyasu noticing, so she could not turn the sound on. However...

“Ah.”

There was a way. She could use an auditory spell to turn two *lernen figurs* into headphones.

She could simply stop reviewing the footage if Yoshiyasu ended her facial care treatment and began to move.

*...That sounds good!*

She was kind of excited because she realized she might hear Yoshiaki's voice.

She drank some more alcohol from a bamboo mug floating on a tray and she booted up the auditory spell.

The two *lernen figurs* that floated in a headphone shape were rotating, growing, and shrinking based on the sound they were playing. She grabbed them and placed them over her ears.

*...Huh...!?*

She thought she had heard gunshots, but why would she hear that?

The recording spell may have picked up the sounds of some other battle while recording hers.

Yoshiaki appeared on the screen but immediately swung her body and vanished, so Kani focused.

That had been an incredible experience. She lowered her gaze toward the footage to remind her of that.

*...What kind of experience is this...!?*

Ookubo defended against Seki's gunfire.

Her locker's door was at the same height as the counter, so she had flung it open with a snap of her left arm.

And...

"...!"

It hit the bullets. The two bullets had definitely been aimed at her face and upper chest.

But the locker door was made of wood and the bullets easily splintered it.

*...This is way too dangerous...!*

Ookubo shouted in her heart, but she was already on the move.

She ducked below the splinters of the locker door and moved forward.

She kept low, but immediately twisted her body to take a legs-first sliding pose.

Seki had entered the changing room by sliding sideways over the counter, so Ookubo took a course to slip under her. Also...

"...Seyah!"

She drew her short sword and swung it upwards.

While Seki slid in from above, Ookubo made an attack from below as she passed by.

But Seki had seen it coming.

With a gun in each hand, she could not control her movement. So instead, she got up on her elbows and knees without slowing her sliding momentum.

“Hah...!”

She made a sideways jump from the counter and soared into the changing room.

She dodged Ookubo’s sword.

While sliding, Ookubo’s back caught on the floor and made a loud sound. It tugged at her skin and created a burning feeling.

But she slipped below the counter and reached the packed dirt floor of the entranceway.

She heard flapping clothing in the changing room behind her. Seki had landed.

Ookubo did not hesitate. She rolled forward with her short sword in hand.

“Later...!”

She leaped outside.

Ookubo went outside.

She could see the cloudy sky overhead. She belatedly realized she could hear cicada cries.

But she could not just stand around. Seki was coming from behind.

She had to escape quickly. She was unsure if she could successfully elude this opponent for the next half hour, but hesitating would not help.

*...Hurry...!*

Still barefoot, she moved to the right. She held the short sword in her right hand and going right placed the bathhouse on her right, so she could use the weapon to deter the enemy.

But just as she chose right and attempted to pass by the entrance to the adjacent men’s bath...

“Eh?”

The next thing she knew, her body had been blown to the right, her vision went dark, and...

“———!?”

She realized she had been sent flipping sideways through the air.

She had been sniped and she had caught it on her prosthetic left arm.

A thought entered her mind for just a moment.

*...Two of them!?*

She mistakenly thought the enemy was working with someone.

But that was not the case.

She had been sniped.

When she was fleeing from Genan, Yoshiyasu had saved her and then roughly pushed her to the ground. But that had been to move her out of the path of a sniper bullet.

Seki had made that sniper shot.

*...I'm so dumb...!*

Seki had aimed pistols at her earlier, hadn't she?

Why had she not connected that gun attack with the previous sniper shot?

Seki did not need to pursue her to fire on her. She only had to set up her sniper rifle at the bathhouse's entrance and remotely control it with gravitational control or a spell.

Then she only had to get Ookubo to leave the bathhouse.

Even from the narrow entranceway, the sniper rifle could easily shoot the target.

And that was exactly what happened. Ookubo's body was shaking from the impact and her limbs were spread out as she flipped through the air.

“Ah.”

She was sent right back into the darkness of the changing room from which she had left.

Seki breathed a sigh of relief.

*...My plan worked.*

Musashi's Representative Committee Head was collapsed on the floor in front of her.

She lay face down with her head turned toward the entrance. Her white stole almost seemed to be covering up her body.

"That looks about right for a summer nap..."

Seki raised her pistols. She stood about 5 meters away, so she could not possibly miss. However...

"...?"

Seki heard an unexpected noise and took a defensive stance.

She heard something moving overhead.

*...Was it a trap?*

She had set up her own sniper trap, so she looked up, wondering if Ookubo had set up a trap of her own.

There was something there.

A silver color was stabbed into the entranceway ceiling at the end of the pole there.

It was the short sword Ookubo had held. When the girl was sent flying by the sniper shot, it must have slipped from her grasp. The blade was shaking unstably.

Seki estimated it would eventually fall down and roll along the packed dirt floor.

*...There is no cause for concern.*

But just as she thought that...

"...Eh?"

Ookubo's body was moving.

She was crawling to bring her trembling body outside.

Her knees were too weak to stand up, so she used her thighs and arms while lifting her hips and working her way toward the sunlight shining through the entrance. And...

“—————”

Ookubo suddenly raised her head.

Seki knew what she was looking at: the sword stabbed into the entranceway ceiling.

She was waiting for it to fall and moving into position so she could catch it.

*...It is no use.*

Seki raised her guns and took aim.

She prepared to squeeze the triggers to fire, but...

“Musashi Representative Committee Head! Are you still not done!?”

A girl’s voice reached them from the bath.

*...Hashiba’s Kani Saizou?*

Satomi Student Council President Satomi Yoshiyasu would be there as well. And based on Kani’s tone of voice, the three of them had been speaking together.

If they had formed some kind of pact, they might interfere here.

*I need to end this quickly,* decided Seki as she aimed her guns at Ookubo.

“...Ah.”

The stole was in the way.

She wanted to target the girl’s torso or head, but the white cloth blocked her view.

Since the guns would make noise, they would only invite interference if she did not finish it in a single shot.

But targeting the legs sticking out from the bottom of the stole would not be fatal.

Meanwhile, Ookubo’s sluggish movements brought her to the entranceway’s



packed dirt floor. She placed her right hand on the edge of the entranceway.

“—————”

And she pulled herself fully onto the packed dirt floor.

The sword was overhead and its blade was about to come free from the ceiling.

...*Not good.*

Seki could not give her opponent even the slightest possibility of victory. She knew that with the certainty of her *Belle de Marionnette* sensibilities.

She would crush the enemy's optimal.

That was the certain method a *Belle de Marionnette* used to achieve victory.

So she moved. To ensure the girls in the bath did not hear, she attached the pistols to her waist hard points and drew the long knife from her apron.

Then she took a virtual breath and moved.

She attacked crawling Ookubo from behind.

Seki took action.

She moved to strike Ookubo who was crawling toward where the short sword would fall.

She targeted the girl's torso.

The stole was in the way, but there was no helping that. She targeted the body pushing the stole up from below.

She made the attack.

While holding the long knife in a backhand grip, she raised it to face height and swung her entire body forward to slam it down.

Or she should have.

...*Huh?*

Just as she stabbed the blade toward the stole, something got in the way.

It was a scabbard. Ookubo had worn two scabbards on her waist hard points and the one for the short sword appeared from below the stole. It slid Seki's long knife to the side.

It was made of lightweight metal, so it split as it protected its owner.

The long knife's blade was deflected and it stabbed into the floor.

It made a dull sound.

Ookubo had avoided the attack and Seki decided it was no coincidence. That kind of defense and movement did not happen by random chance.

Ookubo could not move her body properly.

But she had made the optimum response under those circumstances.

Since she could not recover from her weakened state, she had not tried to hide it and instead used it to guide Seki's actions. She had lured Seki into attempting to finish off a weakened opponent.

If you could predict your opponent's attack, defending was easy.

And Ookubo had crawled to the entranceway.

Seki had been unable to let her go any further than that.

*But, thought Seki. I am in danger if I cannot surpass her expectations.*

So while pulling the long knife out of the floor...

"...!"

Seki kicked her right foot into crawling Ookubo's legs.

She rolled the girl's body past where the sword was stabbed into the ceiling.

Her slender body rose into the air, her back slammed into the entranceway column, and she bounced off to roll along the dirt ground.

But that was not all.

"This is in the way."

While walking forward in pursuit of Ookubo, Seki swung her long knife upwards from forward to back.

She let go of the long knife and used gravitational control to strike the short sword in the ceiling.

With a metallic clang, the short sword came loose and stabbed into the changing room's floor.

Ookubo no longer had a weapon.

And Ookubo coughed quickly.

The kick and the impact from rolling outside had reverberated through her body. Her lungs were shaken and she must have been having difficulty breathing.

Seki approached the girl who doubled over and tried to breathe while lying on her side.

"Excuse me."

Seki lightly but sharply shoved her toes below the girl's head.

This blow did not have the force to send her flying, but that was one of the human body's weak points. Sending a vibration through the throat and sternum would knock the breath out of her and drain her body of strength.

That knowledge was used for assassinations.

Before killing the target, you struck a weak point like that so they would be too limp to scream, struggle, or tense up.

That made it easier to remove the blade from their body and prevented anyone nearby from noticing.

As Musashi's Representative Committee Head, this girl would not be aware of that.

Thus, she would have no countermeasure for it.

After an instant of tension, Ookubo's body went limp.

Seki used her toes to roll her onto her back and then prepared her long knife. She was prepared to lean forward and drive the blade into Ookubo.

Then she noticed something.

When the stole fell away, swimsuited Ookubo was missing something: her left arm.

*...Huh?*

The stole had been hiding that fact all this time. And just as she saw it, Seki saw something stabbing out from the left side of her chest.

It was a blade.

While she leaned forward, this attack had come from above and pierced through her back. It was...

“A sword...!?”

She looked up to the left side of her back and saw a white arm holding a sword.

It was Ookubo's prosthetic.

Ookubo caught her breath.

*...It made it.*

She had never been relying on the short sword stabbed into the ceiling.

Her hopes had been riding on the prosthetic arm and sword caught on the eaves at the entrance.

When she was sniped and blown away, she had made a few predictions about the future.

The most important was that the impact would keep her from moving for a while.

If she could not move, carrying a weapon was meaningless. In fact, there was a chance the enemy could steal the weapon and it could lead the enemy to be extra cautious or extra quick to finish her off.

So she had immediately drawn the sword and used the flailing of her limbs to remove her prosthetic arm.

Then she had left them elsewhere so she could reclaim them once she

recovered.

She had been fortunate the enemy kicked her.

She had not known exactly when the arm and sword stabbed into the eaves would fall down.

But when she rolled outside after being kicked, the blade in the eaves had been visible and hitting the column had shaken it. So...

“It made it.”

She could move her body. She had been surprised when Seki kicked her in a weak point, but her mental preparedness had helped her recover more quickly.

...*Honestly.*

“...Ahh.”

She took in a lungful of air and moved her body.

Seki stood more above her than in front of her.

The automaton looked unsure what to do about the sword stabbing into her back.

That created an opening.

Ookubo took action. Her body was still trembling, but there was one part that would not be shaken and that she could still move.

“My prosthetic arm...!”

Something spilled from Seki’s back and into view.

It was a white prosthetic left arm. The upper arm had split from the earlier sniper shot, but Ookubo hopped up toward its connector.

She only had to move for an instant.

The arm connection could be established in an instant. She had paid a lot of money to have it special made that way.

“————”

Seki understood what was happening and stabbed down with the long knife in her right hand.

But it was too late.

Ookubo connected the arm to herself as if slamming her body into Seki's left side.

As for the long knife...

"...!"

She pulled back with the prosthetic arm to push the blade deep into Seki's back.

The long knife was deflected when it hit the sword stabbing out of her chest.

Then Ookubo moved forward.

As if passing by Seki, she threw her weak body forward but gave accurate instructions to her prosthetic arm.

"Cut her down...!"

The blade had entered Seki's body diagonally.

When she forcibly swung the sword around, it sliced through Seki's body from the left side to the right of her chest.

A tremor ran through Seki's body. Her senses had been instantaneously cut off in response to the slice from the foreign object.

This opponent felt no pain.

But regardless, Ookubo made a few more motions while continuing to hack through Seki.

The swinging blade sliced through the automaton's torso and smashed the internal components.

"—————"

Just as the drawn sword broke, Ookubo's body left the entranceway and rolled into the changing room.

Ookubo finally relaxed her body.

She wobbled on the changing room floor and rolled from her right shoulder.

Her slender body bumped back-first into the bottom of the counter, but she stopped there.

The exhaustion was intense, but words escaped her mouth:

“I did it...”

She had won.

This was a Mouri opponent. It was another Mouri victory following Hassan Furubushi’s.

With two victories, they were as good as guaranteed to get the two Logismo Oplo.

She had achieved success.

That put a smile on her face and she did not fight it when her body collapsed to the left.

A moment later, a long knife was slammed below her left collarbone.

“...!?”

Ookubo’s eyes widened at being pinned to the wall by a blade and she looked forward.

Seki was there.

She had a blade sticking out from the right side of her chest and she touched the left-to-right slice in the chest of her clothing.

“My apologies. ...I failed to correct for your falling motion and stabbed you in suboptimal spot.”

She then pushed on the long knife.

It was a casual but forceful movement.

“Ah...!”

The thick blade below Ookubo’s left collarbone moved with slippery speed as it left her shoulder and entered the wall.

There was barely any pain. The edge of the blade only felt like having

something sharp pressed against her.

She only felt an unpleasant sensation like something was leaving her body. Almost like her body had become a mass of flesh and bones meant to let a blade pass through it.

“Please do not exhale. It will relax your muscles and allow the bleeding to begin.”

Seki spoke calmly, but her body strained. And all of a sudden...

“Nn.”

She expressionlessly released a breath, so she must have taken considerable damage.

However, she literally “extended” her left arm backwards.

She released the joints to send her hand back toward something.

“I will borrow this short sword.”

She held it in her left hand.

Her right hand pushed on the long knife and her left hand raised the short sword.

And she leaned over Ookubo.

*...Kh!*

Ookubo grabbed the hilt of the long knife with her left hand.

But that hand merely held Seki’s hand.

Seki had the stronger grip and Ookubo could not press her weight down on it like Seki could.

“Shall I break your fingers? I have determined I can end this while I do so.”

Seki moved to strike with the short sword.

In that instant, Ookubo pulled her right leg back to her chest. She pressed her right knee against her chest.

“If you’re taking the short sword, then I’ll borrow this.”



Her toes had grabbed a black metal pistol which she passed to her right hand. It was one of the ones at Seki's hip.

"Sorry about having sticky toes, but don't worry. I won't let anyone hear the gunshot."

Ookubo pressed the muzzle against Seki's stomach and pulled the trigger.

Seki was shot at point-blank range.

The impact hit her stomach. But...

*...I can endure this!*

She was wearing an armor apron and the maid uniform was also armored.

Plus, her current *Belle de Marionnette* body was an anti-machine model. Her body was covered by flexible armor and could absorb the impact of a bullet.

She concluded that she could endure two shots.

Besides, her opponent was exhausted. Ookubo's movements when making the previous sword attack proved that she had yet to recover from the damage of the initial sniper attack.

Her arm could not bear the gun's recoil.

Two shots was likely her limit. She could fire two shots, but her hand would fail to hold onto the gun for the third. And then...

*...It is my turn!*

But just as Seki thought that, a third shot hit her stomach.

"...!?"

A fourth and fifth shot arrived. And...

"Ah...!"

Her apron was torn apart and something was destroyed below: her body.

Her stomach structure split open, and...

"So it took six shots."

As the force of the impacts accumulated and reverberated in the core of her body, Seki felt herself floating.

*...How!?*

Her unsteady vision looked down to see Ookubo looking up at her.

She saw something at the girl's throat: light.

It was the ether light of a spell charm.

"This was for the Satomi Student Council President, but of course I'll use it if it's there on the counter. ...It's a sobering spell. In other words, it activates the mind," said Ookubo. "Simply put, it wakes you up and lets you move your body. ...And now to end this."

She fired the seventh shot. And on the eighth shot...

"Oops."

She must have missed Seki's floating body because the bullet flew past the counter.

The automatons behind the counter looked up at the newly-formed hole in the ceiling but ignored the fighters.

At the same time, the gunshots had caused Seki's right hand to go limp, so Ookubo's prosthetic arm deflected the fingers holding the long knife.

As Seki watched, Ookubo forcefully pulled out the long knife along a perfectly straight path.

Seki sensed danger.

The enemy was following her optimum, but Seki could not move.

The repeated gunshots had lifted her body into the air with her upper body collapsed nearly 90 degrees forward.

She only had the short sword in her left hand.

"———!"

As she forcefully swung that around, Ookubo had already pulled out the long knife and stood up.

A moment later, her white left hand grabbed ahold of Seki's face.

And she used the full strength of that prosthetic.

"I sometimes work part-time in the engine division. ...I've had it reinforced."

She forcefully slammed Seki's head onto the counter while it was turned to the left.

A powerful blow struck the right side of Seki's head and her vision shook.

Of course, her face was turned to the side. And it was turned so the back of her head was facing Ookubo.

*She got me*, thought Seki.

Her opponent had done damage to her chest, her stomach, and now her head.

Every one of her *Belle de Marionnette* cores had been damaged beyond the point of on-the-fly adjustments.

*...Princess...!*

Her princess had wanted a victory over Houjou or Musashi. At this rate, she would be unable to provide that.

For a *Belle de Marionnette*, it was humiliating to fail to grant her master's wishes.

Besides, combat was her only strong point. She was a defective doll. Her princess had still given her a position of importance, so if she could not repay her for providing that *raison d'être*...

"Why did I even inherit this name...!?"

But she did have one stroke of luck. When she hit the counter, the sword stabbed into her chest exited through her back.

Without that impediment in her chest, her body no longer strained when she moved her arms.

*...This is my chance.*

Ookubo stood to her right. She had to stand there because she had to hold

Seki in place with her prosthetic left arm. However, that meant she could only attack using her right hand.

Even if she used the long knife, it would be a right-handed attack past her left arm, and how much power could she really place behind that?

Ookubo must not have known what to do next because she gathered strength in her left arm.

The inner shell of Seki's head strained as it was pushed down onto the counter.

But despite the static entering her vision, she passed the short sword from her left hand to her right below the counter. She spun the hilt around in her hand and grasped it tightly.

*...I will take this victory...!*

She swung the short sword outwards.

Her target was Ookubo's left side. The slash would be fatal to a human.

But that was fine. Nothing mattered more than victory right now. So she released her elbow joint mid-slash to make a high-speed snap toward Ookubo.

A moment later, Seki noticed two oddities.

First, her sword strike had sliced through empty air. And second...

*...Eh?*

The prosthetic arm pressing on her head had gone limp.

Those two oddities could only mean one thing.

Ookubo had removed the prosthetic arm from her shoulder and dodged.

Seki understood that Ookubo's movement was a form of evasive action.

She had likely done everything she could to dodge Seki's attack.

As a result, she had given up on holding Seki in place. That meant Seki had her freedom back, but it also invited a certain danger.

Ookubo's left arm no longer got in her way.

...*Not good...!*

Seki knew she had to move quickly.

At the same moment, the limp prosthetic arm fell away from the side of her face.

That opened up the left side of her vision.

She could see the ceiling.

And she saw something there.

A shutter was lowering toward the counter.

“———!?”

It was a security shutter that would close to protect what was inside.

The *Belle de Marionnettes* had ignored her throughout the battle.

But they would react to the surrounding situation.

Earlier, Ookubo had fired on her, but she had missed the final shot which had flown past the counter. That had not been the result of carelessness.

It had been to make the automatons close the shutter.

And sure enough, the security shutter was lowering. Its metal material was made to resist both physical and spell attacks.

“Princess...!”

Seki moved. She moved her head to pull it out before the shutter fell.

“You can have this back.”

The long knife pierced her through the back and into the counter below her.

She was pinned in place and her head groaned as the shutter tried to crush it. However...

“———!”

She pulled her body out.

She let the long knife slice through her chest and forcibly distorted the shape of her head to pull herself free.

“Ha.”

With control of her full body restored, she stood up.

Ookubo saw something unbelievable.

An automaton covered in broken parts stood before her.

The shutter had left a mark on the left side of her head, there was a horizontal slash through her chest, there was a vertical slash up through her right collar bone, and the stomach of her inner suit shook past the torn apron.

The only thing supporting her at this point was a portion of the external armor and her gravitational control.

But she turned to face Ookubo.

“Princess...”

Seki opened a *signe cadre* and spoke into it.

“I will fulfill your request.”

...*That’s crazy!*

What could she do in that state?

But Ookubo heard a voice coming from that *signe cadre*.

It was Mouri Terumoto.

Her voice was staticky over the divine transmission.

“Well done. I’m following the situation. ...You did well to stand back up on your own at the end there, Seki Masasada. My *Belle de Marionnette* had better not lose.”

Listen.

“Don’t lose. ...Simply *accept* defeat.”

Those words stopped Seki’s movement. And she finally nodded.

“Testament. Therefore...”

“Testament. Move on to the next one, Seki. And before that, show her the

conqueror's courtesy."

"Testament," repeated Seki before moving again.

Ookubo saw the damaged automaton placed a hand on her chest and kneel.

"In the name of Lady Terumoto's generosity...I will accept defeat here, Lady Ookubo Nagayasu."

In front of Ookubo, the automaton bowed once and then stood up.

Ookubo felt like the automaton was smiling a little.

But Seki's eyes were barely focused beyond her cracked glasses.

Even so, she spoke.

"I am so glad the princess has not given up on me."

"...Where will you go now?"

"I will make what readjustments I can...and move on to Houjou."

With that, Seki bowed again.

If the previous one had been for her master, this one would be from her personally.

In an instant, Seki vanished.

Seki Masasada was a Mouri ninja. No matter how badly damaged she was, she would not do an inadequate job as long as she knew her master had not given up on her.

"Honestly...that really is crazy."

Ookubo muttered to herself as she slumped down to the floor.

"Oh, man."

She intentionally opened her mouth wide as she spoke.

"I can't keep going like this."

The warm bleeding below her left collarbone had started on her back as well.

A few sign frames appeared and began healing with divine protections. It had

been a sharp blade, so the wound would close up before long. She knew further treatment would be necessary to ensure the disturbance to the blood flow did not leave a mark as it healed. However, that was not her present concern.

“Hey, excuse me.”

She turned toward the shuttered counter and placed an order.

“Could I get something to wipe myself off with, some food with a lot of iron, and something to drink?”

Also...

“I’m curious about the karaoke in the bath, but I want to sleep so bad.”

*I really am exhausted*, she thought deep in her heart.

The shutter slowly opened behind her.



# **Chapter 57: Preparers in the Singing Place**

# 第五十七章

## 『唄い場の準備者達』



これぞ  
まさしく  
命を懸けた  
配点 (ピガーン)

*This is it:*

*Something I really*

*Risked my life on*

### **Point Allocation (Facial Care)**

“Um.”

Yoshiyasu awoke to that voice.

*...I fell asleep!?*

She remembered she was on the battlefield, but nothing more than that.

Falling asleep should have been entirely off limits. Plus...

*...I can't breathe...!*

*Why am I only seeing white and why can I barely breathe?*

*Oh, no. My panic messed with my breathing and I'm not getting enough oxygen...*

“...Wait, what's with this cloth!? An assassination attempt!?”

When she tore the towel from her face and raised her head, her neck cracked.

She must have been sleeping for a while.

But she now remembered placing the towel over her eyes to hide the fact that she was drunk. She had hoped to keep people away by giving off a sense of “you're annoying me and I'm tired” and hiding the slackness of her eyes had been necessary for that. It should have been an accurate decision.

So who had used the fact that she had fallen asleep to attempt an assassination?

“Did you do this!?”

“Eh!? That's the Satomi clan's facial care treatment, isn't it!?”

*...Of course not!*

But based on Kani's reaction, Ookubo must have done it.

Probably to hide the fact that Yoshiyasu had fallen asleep and stopped moving. In that case...

“Exactly right.” Yoshiyasu crossed her arms and tried to sound convincing. “For Satomi’s facial care treatment, do this once a day and your chest will grow.”

“That sure is a new form of facial care!”

*Oops, I let my own dream slip in there.* Yoshiyasu changed the subject to avoid further questions.

“But where is Ookubo?”

Kani shrugged and pointed at the *lernen figur* next to her face.

Yoshiyasu called up her own sign frame and checked the Siege of Odawara information there.

“...She went and fought a duel?”

“Testament! She left earlier and it seemed like she was hinting she was going to the bathroom for #2, but it looks like she was going to fight a duel!”

The location was listed as “bathhouse”.

“A duel in the bathroom...?”

“I-I wonder how they did that!? Length maybe!?”

“The healthiness would seem more normal.”

“I see!”

While Kani nodded, Yoshiyasu decided not to go see Ookubo for a bit. However, she did not have a bad feeling about her. She had won and the sign frame said she was in her rest period. She had not withdrawn or dropped out. Ookubo was still in this.

And if Ookubo said she was fine, then she was fine. *In that case*, thought Yoshiyasu.

“What will you do?”

Ookubo had planned on dueling Kani and Kani had accepted it. However...

“Testament! Satomi Student Council President! Please duel me!”

“Huh?”

Yoshiyasu frowned at the sudden request.

“Um.” Kani sounded troubled. “Please look at this!”

She called up a *lernen figur* which displayed the earlier duel request. It listed the participants as Kani and...

“It doesn’t specify who my opponent would be!”

“Hold on. Why me? ...And can’t you just cancel that request?”

“The Musashi Representative Council Head submitted it, so I can’t cancel it!”

*...Can’t they make these things so either side can cancel them?*

Ookubo’s request was still in effect with Kani registered, but Ookubo had not registered herself and she was no longer here. So...

“You’re on Musashi’s side here, Satomi Student Council President! So please!”

“Yes, th-then I guess I have no choice.”

“Thank you very much! Let’s have a karaoke competition!”

“Huh?”

*...A karaoke competition?*

*But I’ve almost never done karaoke.*

Yoshiyasu mentally held her head in her hands.

*...I don’t know how to do karaoke.*

Kani seemed to be connecting her *lernen figur* to the bathhouse service and registering the karaoke program, but Yoshiyasu had no idea how to do any of that.

Of course, she had a general image of how karaoke worked.

You ordered an existing song on your sign frame, the lyrics would appear on the sign frame, and you would sing along with that.

And you would receive a score based on how well you sang.

While doing that, you would eat snacks and whatnot to just generally have a good time.

Yes, thought Yoshiyasu as she thought through her image of karaoke.

*...That's the polar opposite of who I am...!*

*Can I have a good time by singing songs? Can I really? Wouldn't it feel more like I'm being forced to have a good time while singing? Wouldn't it? Isn't that what they call peer pressure? Right? Just come out and say it. Well? Wait, who just said I have no friends!?*

“...Ah.”

No, she had done karaoke once.

After a Satomi meeting, they had gone out to celebrate at a local bar called the Kujukuri Tikal Hammer.

There had been a karaoke spell set there.

Her sister had gotten oddly excited about it and she had realized her sister must do that kind of thing a lot, but when Yoshiyori (who had still been named Noritoki at the time) sang, everyone had fallen silent, a few had cried, and it had created an odd atmosphere.

She had been told to sing something, but she did not know any of the songs and she was eventually pressured into singing a Russian song with her sister. Thinking back, it was a happy memory.

*...Although I seem to recall having to sing about vodka up the ass...!*

Regardless, that was her only karaoke experience.

“Satomi Student Council President! How much should we sing for the competition!?”

“One song is enough.”

Or rather, she was unsure if she could even sing one song.

Just to be safe, she decided to ask something.

“Kani Saizou, how much do you do karaoke?”

“Testament! I do it all the time at neighborhood association gatherings and with my friends!”

“Is that so?”

“Testament! Although my friends often start asking for life advice right away, so I tend to be the only one singing! But they buy me snacks, so it’s great!”

*She’s an enemy...* thought Yoshiyasu for some reason.

*...Yes, she’s definitely an enemy.*

Yoshiyasu felt like they could get along and she did not think their personalities would clash, but the way Kani lived her life was just too different.

*...No, I guess that’s just how name inheritors are... Yeah...*

Generally, singing karaoke at neighborhood associations and eating snacks with friends was just not in the cards for name inheritors. However...

“Ah.”

She recalled how good her sister had been at karaoke. In that case...

*...Am I the odd one out!? Wait!*

When she started scrutinizing herself like this, it was best to think of it as her form of individuality.

But even if she kept that problem contained to herself, there was still a risk here.

“...Kani Saizou. How often do you do karaoke?”

“Testament! Four times!”

“Four times!?”

*That’s not much,* thought Yoshiyasu.

“Four times a week! We often go after our club activities, so it really helps me keep in touch with my friends! I’ve racked up a whole bunch of point cards that way!”

*She really is an enemy,* silently concluded Yoshiyasu.

Regardless, this was bad. Her opponent was an expert and she was essentially an amateur.

*...How am I supposed to win this!?*

No, she needed to think about how to approach this competition.

*...What do I do!?*

And while Yoshiyasu thought in the bath, Kani suddenly tilted her head.

“Huh...?”

Kani shut down the karaoke program and then reconnected via the bathhouse divine transmission line.

The available services appeared on a *lernen figur* and she searched through the karaoke-related options. However...

*...This isn't good!*

“The karaoke here only has old *sarugaku*!”

“Old?”

“Testament! This system is by the Yogakara brand, but since it uses the Reizei format, it's primarily eastern songs and has almost nothing from the west! That means none of the newer Nijo School songs!”

“For example?”

“There's nothing new like Red-zome Emon♀'s Number 59 or Semigan's Rear Razor Burn and it's all songs by old people like Roman Tomonokika and Mistaken King.”

“What does that meant?”

“There's nothing I know how to sing!”

“Judge. I see.”

For some reason, the Satomi Student Council President held out her right hand, so they shook hands.

Then Kani looked at the song list again.



*...Which one can I sing...!?*

She had heard there were some pretty big cultural differences between the Far East's west and east sides. She understood the subtle flavor and strong flavor difference after eating some food here, but...

*...The song culture is different too!*

But she was not sure what to do about it.

She could not see anything on the list she could sing karaoke-style.

Was this from an older age? Or did they just have a different idea of what was new?

What was she to do?

In the hopes of finding a hint, she tried asking a question.

"Umm. ...Are there any easy-to-sing songs on here?"

Yoshiyasu felt her body temperature drop in the bath.

*...Easy-to-sing songs!?*

None of them would be easy for her. The only songs she knew were the Song of Passage and the Satomi academy song.

But it would be dangerous to let her opponent know how bad she was at karaoke.

Let Kani take the lead and she might end up challenged to a song only Kani could sing.

*...Kh...!*

She had to think. The song did not have to be a pop song or Gagaku.

"...Oh."

*Come to think of it, thought Yoshiyasu. That vassal sometimes talks about a divine TV show. I never know what she's talking about, but maybe I should have watched that.*

She was pretty sure it was called Flying Battleship 1648. She remembered the

vassal saying it had an aerial warship modeled after the Musashi firing a main canon on the Oda clan, but hadn't a certain ship done something very similar in reality recently? A ship she had been riding, in fact.

*...I'm pretty sure that show's theme song was super popular...*

She sometimes heard it on the divine radio, but she only half-remembered the intro.

She did not remember the lyrics.

"Well!?"

"It seems I was thinking of a rather difficult one. Yes."

She had to wonder just how ignorant she was here.

She could not let it get to her. If she was ignorant, she was ignorant.

But if she refused to accept that ignorance, the duel would be over and she would lose.

*...Now, then.*

At that point a sudden thought occurred to Yoshiyasu: *Wait.*

She had done karaoke once.

It was an old memory and she did not remember it all that well, but it was a memory with her sister and him. She had been pressured into singing a song with her sister.

She did not remember the name of the song, but...

"...Sorry. There is a song I'm thinking of."

"What is it!?"

"Well, I was hoping you knew. ...It mentions vodka up the ass in the lyrics."

"You mean the Cossack Enemy Footrace!?"

Yoshiyasu was shocked to find that clue was sufficient.

And she saw Kani hold up her *lernen figur* in celebration "I can sing that! It was one of the theme songs for Dragoon-emon, a drama my dad grew up with 20 years ago! Do you know Dragoon-emon!?"

“Yes...the original opening song went ‘ahn, ahn, ahn, I’ve never done this before, Dragoon-emon’ and got banned almost immediately, right? In every episode of the show itself, the unit would be nearly wiped out until they pulled a mysterious holy gadget from a phase space, but that had a way of only exacerbating their problems.”

“But sometimes it would work out well, so you had to keep watching!”

Kani was only getting more excited. Probably because they were going to compete with a song her father liked.

And for Yoshiyasu, it was the song she had sung with her sister.

“Then I’ll send the lyrics page to you!”

Kani started to operate her *lernen figur* but came to a stop and smiled bitterly.

“We didn’t exchange divine mail addresses!”

“That’s fine. Just make me a copy of that sign frame.”

“Testament!”

Kani slid her hand to split the *lernen figur* in two and she passed one of them to Yoshiyasu.

Yoshiyasu accepted it and found it was a Catholic-style one. Something occurred to her as she viewed the white frame.

*...Not exchanging addresses there is just like me, isn’t it?*

At the moment, she could justify it as being cautious. But was it thanks to her life on the Musashi that she could reflect on these things now?

Anyway, she sighed in her heart before viewing the lyrics.

**Leaving footprints in the snowy white, we march through the dark night.**

**Dreams of romance dance before our eyes. The enemy force is ten or twenty times our size. We shout like a maniac and charge in to attack.**

**Once every last one has been knocked to the snowy grass, they get the vodka penalty: 120 proof up the ass.**

**How about that? It's like a volcano in your pants. But don't blame us; just do the Cossack dance.**

**Khorosho khorosho khorosho khorosho**

**Setting our sights beyond the tower, we march through the festival hour.**

**We gallop forth to claim our prize. Their sword troops are eight or nine times our size. We hit their infantry and trample them by horse.**

**Once every last one has been flattened on the snowy grass, they get the piroshki penalty: hot spices up the ass.**

**Can you feel it in your guts? The Tatars can really fight. If you can feel the battle, then it's tartar sauce tonight.**

**Khorosho khorosho khorosho khorosho**

*...What is this!?*

She was now questioning whether she had actually sung this before.

No, she remembered her sister hopping around, so the khorosho part was definitely real.

And what kind of music did you sing this to?

*...Umm.*

*This is an emergency*, she told herself while opening a divine transmission sign frame.

“Huh?”

Asama tilted her head while sitting on a bench with Mitotsudaira, Horizon, and Toori.

“Um, Masazumi? Toori-kun and everyone else too. I just got a divine transmission from Yoshy-chan, but, um...can any of you sing the Cossack Enemy Footrace?”

Everyone turned toward Kimi.

Mitotsudaira began glaring as she spoke to Kimi.

“After causing us so much trouble this morning – and continuing to cause us trouble now – how about you be useful for once?”

“Heh heh. If you insist... Okay, I’ll show Yoshy how it’s done.”

Kimi pulled a microphone spell frame from her cleavage.

After receiving some audio data from the Asama Shrine Representative, Yoshiyasu played it on her sign frame.

She heard the Chancellor’s sister singing with some simple accompaniment. She had a habit of listening to audio spells in headphones mode so she could listen to divine transmissions while working on her god of war, but what she heard this time was different.

And as the lunatic’s voice reached her ears...

*...How in the world is she this good!?*

The intonation carried the emotion so perfectly and there was no way Yoshiyasu could do the same. It would require a fair amount of training to even try to sing it in the same way.

*...I-I’ll take it as a lesson in how high level those upperclassmen are...*

*And this is that weird girl...* she thought as an odd secondary and tertiary shock set in, so she began typing on the sign frame keyboard once more.

“Huh?”

Asama tilted her head again.

She spoke to Kimi who was drinking ginger ale with the others.

“Kimi, Yoshy-chan said your singing is too good to be any help.”

“Eh? But I did it as casually as I do when I’m playing with the children in the park.”

“I’m kind of impressed the children can keep up...”

“Really? But if I’m too godlike for her, then who else can sing it for her?”

“Umm,” said Asama as she looked to someone else. Everyone else turned in the same direction. “Masazumi.”

“Wait! I don’t know that song!”

“Oh? You don’t? The show is pretty popular and, from Mikawa to Odawara, the series tends to start re-airing as soon as a previous airing ends.”

“Maybe so.” Masazumi tilted her head. “But during elementary and middle school, I spent my spare time studying and my dad is really strict...”

“Look! Look, Koni-tan! They’re re-airing Dragoon-emon in this region!”

“Ho ho? With a total of 4712 episodes, that is an impressive undertaking! And it seems they are using a special version of the OP! ...Oh, this is the episode where Lieutenant Shotaluvavich returns after escaping the collective farm, fails to suppress her fetish, and gets thrown in solitary confinement. And when they give her a Walk-Through-Walls Icon to rescue her, she ends up falling into an open-air bath full of boys and is arrested a second time...”

“Indeed it is. A lot of children must have developed odd fetishes because of this show. They should re-air it more often! How about we do it on Musashi again!? Yes, let’s do that! Let’s re-air the best episodes, Koni-tan!”

“Nobu-tan! Nobu-tan! You’re already selecting the most severe episodes, aren’t you!?”

*My dad must be working hard right now,* thought Masazumi with a sigh.

*...I guess this is part of the job too.*

“Fine then. But tell the Satomi Student Council President not to expect much.”

After seeing Asama nod, Masazumi opened a microphone spell. It was for speeches, but she figured it was good enough.

She started singing while telling herself it was best to take it easy with these things.

About five minutes passed.

**Asama:** “Um, uh, Masazumi? I’ll try to put this in a way that won’t hurt you, but Yoshie-chan said that wasn’t what she expected and she’s wondering if hope has always been an illusion.”

**Sticky King:** “How philosophical...”

**Vice President:** “You didn’t try very hard not to hurt me, did you!? And don’t blame me! I said not to expect much!”

**Me:** “I just listened to that and there was a lot of clipping in the recording. Also, did you sing the whole thing in your speech-giving voice? That’s honestly kind of impressive.”

**Silver Wolf:** “Um, my king? I don’t think you need to criticize Masazumi so much.”

Yoshiyasu saw a third audio file arrive from Musashi.

It was titled “Bell + Adele”.

*...I’m skeptical...*

She tried playing it.

“Oh, Yoshie-chan just said that one was fine.”

Suzu and Adele grabbed each other’s hands and celebrated at Asama’s words, so Mitotsudaira smiled bitterly.

“With both of you together, she might have been able to pick and choose which sound she liked more.”

“Judge. When it’s just me, everything tends to sound like a march.”

“A-and I...tend to be...too quiet.”

“Heh heh. Listen. That was made from both of your strong points, so you

need to praise each other.”

Kimi sounded cheerful.

Then Mitotsudaira looked to Masazumi.

“As Vice President, how do you think things are going?”

“Judge. Thanks to Ookubo’s efforts, we now have two victories over Mouri. That means we can request both Logismo Oplo from them. On the other hand...”

“Please not the uooooooooooooon!”

Summer uniformed Heidi held her head in her hands, but Masazumi only glanced in her direction and cleared her throat.

“We have a loss each to Date and Hashiba. We have an idea what Date will negotiate for, so we can keep an eye on their actions and enter negotiations. As for Hashiba...”

“That battle was fought with them as Houjou, right?”

“Judge. So I’m trying to come up with some way of using that.”

Futayo opened her mouth to speak after crunching through some watermelon seeds.

“Would we be able to get a win in on Houjou?”

“I feel like it would have been possible if the udon wasn’t out of money, but it would be difficult the way things are now. ...It doesn’t look like Houjou Ujiteru intends to leave the café. That leaves Houjou Ujinao and the Mouse named Kotarou, but Mouri’s Reine des Garous and Seki should be moving on them.”

“Yes, Seki will probably duel Kotarou while the Reine des Garous duels Ujinao-sama.”

“My mother can be capricious, but she is not someone you can defeat when she actually takes things seriously.”

That was what made Hassan’s victory such an achievement.

As for the upcoming battles...



“Mogami Yoshiaki defeated Kani earlier, so Hashiba can make up for that loss if the Satomi Student Council President loses here.”

Masazumi crossed her arms. And...

“As an extra line of defense, this is a surprisingly important duel.”

“Now, then,” said Yoshiyasu as she stood up from the bath.

She climbed up to the washing area and lightly dried off her sweat with a towel.

*...I’ve mostly learned it.*

She had memorized how the lyrics connected to the music and how to time for the intonation.

For a god of war pilot like her, this was far easier than memorizing her mission orders in one go. The route from Satomi to Houjou could be very complex when flown for an interception or invasion because it would involve lots of ascents and evasions through defended airspace.

When she applied that to the song, the tempo was like the speed and the intonation was like the ascents and descents. The volume of her voice may have been like the combat.

After checking through it five times, she had it all down pat.

“I’m ready. ...Let’s do this, Kani Saizou.”

“Testament! I look forward to it!”

Kani left the bath as well.

She opened a *lernen figur* in her hand. It displayed the scoring for their karaoke.

It had three scored fields:

**<Pitch – Volume – Likeness>**

“You start with 100 points and you lose points for each mistake! Your final score is whatever you have left at the end of the song!”

# **Chapter 58: Runner in the Musice**

## 第五十八章

### 『唄い場の疾走者』



ハイ  
じゃあ本日の歌い手さんはこちら—  
配点（どちらだよ）

Okay

*This one will be today's singer*

### **Point Allocation (Which One?)**

*The contest has started!* thought Kani.

While using the bathhouse's bath as an audio facility, she used a *lernen figur* microphone as a weapon and poured her soul into her voice.

She and her opponent moved.

The music had started.

They needed to line up side by side and prepare for battle.

They were preparing for a song battle, so she first needed to breathe.

"— — — —"

The first word was coming.

*...I need to breathe perfectly for the very first word of the song!*

After all, her singing was being scored from the very beginning.

So it was important to be accurate from the very first note. That was necessary if she was to earn a good score as the song continued.

But she saw this first note as a high barrier.

In a song, you could not just sing loudly.

The volume category in karaoke scoring was not just asking for her to be loud. If she was loud when it was supposed to be more restrained, she would lose points.

The scoring standards were stored within the karaoke program's song data.

The data was calculated from the pitch and relative volume of the original song and it could be cruel. Any deviation from that would be presented to the singer as a reduction in score.

Thus, this very first note was a barrier for the singer.

Before singing that first note, they had no way of knowing what volume standards were stored in the song data.

The desired volume was an unknown.

The only way to fight it was to make an educated guess based on experience.

The more you knew the song, the better you could guess.

And the more karaoke experience you had, the better you know the average volume requested by the control data.

She needed the appropriate volume.

But she could not produce that just by breathing in.

To sing was to release air from the lungs and vibrate the vocal cords.

And it was the muscles around the diaphragm that moved the lungs.

Muscles could expand and contract. To narrow the lungs and expel the air required a contraction of the muscles.

But there was a limit to the expansion and contraction of muscles.

They could be expanded quite far, but the parts that were not fully expanded would pull back and lead to a contraction.

So if she took too big a breath, her diaphragm would rapidly contract when she started singing and produce an unexpectedly loud voice.

To sing was to control the body.

Experience taught you how to handle such things.

And in that sense, Kani knew she would be fine. She had plenty of experience.

Kani breathed in just as Yoshiyasu did. The music picked up speed.

“—————”

They both opened their throats. Kani raised her arm and Yoshiyasu mostly just stood in place.

“...!!”

They sang.

Kani rated her first line quite highly.

“Leaving footprints.”

Her voice started good.

“In the snowy white.”

And it continued strongly.

Her many years of experience had allowed her to guess the desired volume.

The tricky part was the timing of her voice.

*...That's always a barrier!*

The lyrics were being displayed on a karaoke *lernen figur*.

What she was to sing was colored red, but for the first word, everything was white. The red just suddenly appeared from the left.

The music and the color change both pointed to the exact instant required. If you missed that, you would fail to sing that first word.

This time, Kani had chosen not to rely on the lyrics display.

She had heard her father sing this so many times, so she had based it on the music.

If she had been wrong, she would have had no regrets because her own memories of her family mattered more to her.

But it had been right.

The music was a slightly different arrangement from the one local to her home, but the timing was the same.

She had matched the timing of her father who had been singing the song for 20 years. There was no way it would be wrong.

*...How was that!?*

Kani took a breath while looking at the *lernen figur*.

Her score was currently at 103 points.

She had started at 100 and earned some points. Kani understood this scoring system now. The standards inside the karaoke program's song data were...

*...Pretty stingy!*

Kani thought, *This is going to be a tough contest!*

After all, the program did not award many points.

With her local karaoke, an opening line like that would have left her with a total of 105 points.

That meant the song data standards here required you to match the original song more.

But that was not too surprising.

*...It means this is a tough song!*

It was her father's song, so of course it was tough for a child like her. Kani told herself to be careful.

*...Dad is amazing for singing this...!*

That was what it meant, so she did not tense her body as she took a breath.

"We march through."

She swung her arm, looked up toward the sky, and sang.

"The dark night."

And while taking her next breath, she looked to her left.

She found it odd that the Satomi Student Council President had not moved at all while singing. Standing entirely still like that would make it hard to sing loudly or take breaths.

*...Wh-what is her score!?*

Kani glanced at the *lernen figur* between them.

And it said...

*...75!?*

Her opponent had already lost a lot of points.

Yoshiyasu had screwed up right away.

There was a simple reason. She had breathed in and prepared herself just fine, but...

*...I was watching the wrong sign frame.*

She should have been looking at the sign frame that appeared in front of her. One had appeared in front of both girls and the lyrics there turned red.

But she had not noticed it at first.

Yoshiyasu had been checking the lyrics on the sign frame Kani had passed her earlier.

Her tension must have narrowed her vision.

So when she had prepared to sing the first line, the red meant to indicate the start had not come.

“...?”

*...Is it an old system?*

*Shouldn't it at least give you some kind of signal?* she thought just as Kani got started ahead of her.

The music continued before she could even regret not judging the start from that music.

She managed to start singing from the middle of the line, but...

“...snowy...!”

Her voice was too loud.

The sound from the microphone crackled and that caused her to briefly withdraw.

As a result, her voice grew too quiet.

*...I screwed that up!*



She swore to herself she would fix this and made a gamble.

She chose to give up on this opening part.

The initial loud voice and the subsequent quiet voice allowed her to guess about how loud she was supposed to sing.

So she could not continue singing in fear like this. Do that and everything else would have begun with fear.

A mistake was a mistake.

Continuing and trying to recover while still rattled would not work, so she needed to stop and get a fresh start.

*Yes. Calm down, Satomi Yoshiyasu. You are Satomi's Student Council President.*

*Accept your mistake as a mistake and do it right next time.*

*A normal student like Kani is singing just fine next to you, so there is no way you can't do it too.*

*That's right.*

So Yoshiyasu stopped singing and listened to the music.

She listened to that half-remembered music and checked her score: 75 points.

*What? I screwed up that badly and I only lost 25% of my score?*

*In a battle against an expert, a single mistake can cost you everything.*

*This has only just begun, she told herself.*

*"?"*

Kani was looking to her from the right.

The girl looked shocked at the displayed score.

But Yoshiyasu did not let it bother her. The music was approaching the next part.

In that slight gap, Yoshiyasu spoke to Kani.

*"Don't worry about it. ...I will catch up."*

*...Incredible!*

Kani was shocked by the Satomi Student Council President: *She must be a karaoke expert!*

While Kani had worked her mind so hard to acquire those points, the other girl had casually thrown out the first part.

She probably meant it as a handicap. After all...

*...That comment isn't in the lyrics, so it cost her points!*

Kani looked and saw her opponent's score was now 72.

The 3 point loss was definitely from that comment between parts.

But she had to know how the system worked. Karaoke was a standard part of a school life and anyone could figure out the scoring system after doing it a few times. So...

"...!"

Kani realized she was up against a formidable opponent.

So she carved a certain phrase into her heart.

*...I'll do my best!*

Satomi was a small Kantou nation, but this girl now acted as part of Musashi's forces.

This enemy karaoke master stood before Kani now, so she nodded.

"I'll do my best!!"

Minus three points.

But that made them even. She and her opponent stood on the same stage. And...

"———"

The next part began.

Kani listened to the music and remembered her father's singing.

"Dreams of romance."

Just before she sang, she heard another voice from her left.

It was the Satomi Student Council President. She sang with a slightly different timing.

"Dreams of romance."

*...She's fast!?*

The karaoke system was cruel. On that girl's scoring section of the *lernen figur*, the "likeness" field was flashing purple.

She had lost some points.

But when Kani checked the Satomi Student Council President's score as she sang...

*...74!?*

*Odd*, thought Kani. However...

"Dance before our eyes."

75.

"The enemy force is."

77.

And...

"Ten or twenty times our size."

79.

Kani trembled as she watched her enemy's rapidly rising score.

*...What is going on!?*

The Satomi Student Council President's "likeness" score continued to flash purple, but when Kani checked her own score...

*...104...!*

There was a 25 point difference.

But the difference had originally been 28 points.

*...What is going on!?*

She did not understand. She had plenty of karaoke experience and all of her scoring fields were flashing red. That meant she was earning points.

Meanwhile, her opponent's pitch and volume fields were flashing red while the likeness field was flashing purple.

She was losing points, but she was still closing in on Kani.

"We shout like a maniac."

The enemy now had 82.

Kani had 106.

*...What is this...!?*

"And charge in to attack."

The enemy had 85.

And Kani had...

*...108!*

The 28 point difference had been reduced to 23 during this part.

"Huh? The Satomi Student Council President's score is rising really fast."

Adele held up her sign frame to show everyone.

They had been monitoring the situation since the previous divine transmission conversation. This was possible since Mogami was being treated as part of Musashi's forces here, but...

*...What is going on here?*

Adele tilted her head. She was mostly listening in because the Satomi Student Council President had accepted their version of the song, but...

"She lost a bunch of points earlier, so what is happening now?"

Both girls' scores were rising.

*Keeping your score from dropping is impressive enough*, thought Adele as the Chancellor spoke from behind her.

“Is it giving her a handicap because she sucks so bad?”

“Heh heh. Foolish brother? You just need to sing the song yourself. Then you would understand.”

“Um, Kimi-san? I sang it and I don’t get it...”

“Oh?” Kimi smiled. “That’s because you sang it with Suzu. Of course you wouldn’t understand when the voices complemented each other.”

She then turned toward the Vice President.

“Hey, Masazumi? I bet you actually figured it out right away. Am I right?”

“Huh?”

The Vice President turned around while organizing some negotiation documents.

“How can you say that after claiming it sounded like I was giving a speech?”

“So you do understand.”

“Huh?”

The Vice President tilted her head further, so Kimi sent her a bitter smile.

“There are a few reasons for Flatty’s rising score. ...She might be in trouble if her opponent figures it out, but this comeback is certainly amusing.”

“Wait, wait. Sis, what are you saying is happening?”

“Well,” said Kimi as she viewed the sign frame Adele held up.

The scrolling lyrics had reached the second half of the next part.

“They get the vodka penalty: 120 proof...”

“ ‘Up the ass’,” recited Kimi. “See? Look.”

Kani Saizou had failed to improve her score this time, so she remained at 107 points. As for the Satomi Student Council President...

“...She has more than 100 points!

She was up to 102.

The difference was 15 points. But...

*...How did that happen!?*

Kani realized why her opponent had made this comeback.

*...I get it now!*

She had chosen to sacrifice this part so she could listen to her opponent's voice.

And she had come to understand two things.

*...Dad...!*

For some reason, the Satomi Student Council President's voice sounded like her father's voice.

Of course, that girl could not possibly be a relative.

But it was obvious why she misheard the voice.

The Satomi Student Council President was singing it a lot like a man.

The karaoke scoring system wanted accuracy based on the supplied song data.

So the singer generally focused on each individual note and respected the flow between them. You could say that method focused on the "technique" of the intonation and phrasing and on the "power" of the volume.

But there was a striking difference outside of that "technique" and "power" that showed up between men and women or between adults and children.

Their build and skeletal structure caused their mouths to open differently.

The size of the mouth was linked to the width of the throat, which created differences in pitch and volume.

The Satomi Student Council President opened her mouth much like a man.

Her combat style was Knight Striker.

She lived on the battlefields and in the maintenance bays of the giant objects known as gods of war, so she would be used to speaking loudly.

And this Cossack Enemy Footrace was one of Kani's father's favorite songs.

It was originally sung by a man and it was about a group of warriors. The song had a battle image and it was made for a male voice.

Kani had that she was singing it accurately.

But that accuracy had not left her own boundaries.

She had thought she was opening her mouth wide and clearing her throat, but that was only in terms of how she usually sang.

This was different.

She could not sing as "her family's daughter" during a neighborhood association meeting.

Nor could she sing as "a classmate" during a gathering of her friends.

She had to be the singer of the Cossack Enemy Footrace.

That was it.

And that was exactly what the Satomi Student Council President had done.

Thinking back, Kani understood why that girl had been standing so straight. Singing with a male voice was hard enough as it is, so it was best if she fixed her body in place and allowed her voice through her throat with no wavering whatsoever. In other words...

"————"

Kani realized something else while listening to the Satomi Student Council President singing.

There was another decisive difference between the two of them.

*...Her lung capacity!*

"I said this was the song for Masazumi, didn't I?"

Asama listened as Kimi narrowed her eyes and spoke.

“This is a war drama song in a male voice. It was of course sung by a male singer who focused on intensity. Foolish brother, that’s why you noticed Masazumi was using her speech-giving voice, wasn’t it? That isn’t anything to laugh at. ...This song was made for someone with that kind of voice. And...”

“And...what, Kimi?”

“Heh heh. Flatty has another advantage here.”

“...She does?” asked Adele before having an idea. “Oh, with a flat chest, her voice reverberates uniformly inside her!”

Everyone turned to Adele with looks of realization. And they spoke in unison.

“Incredible, Adele! You must have the best reverberation of all!”

“Yes, I can see why Flatty okayed her rendition.”

“Um, Suzu?” said Asama. “You may have some deviation in the reverberation, but that gives the song a necessary ‘tremor’, so it’s actually a good thing. Adele creates more of a digital sound.”

“Huh, huh?” said Adele. “Am I being bullied again!?”

But Kimi smiled bitterly and spoke.

“I don’t know about the chest size, but there is one advantage I know she has: lung capacity.”

“Yoshy-chan’s lung capacity?”

“Judge. Flatty – by which I mean, Yoshy – is a Knight Striker, right? Now, a question: what do god of war pilots do to train?”

“Well...” said Asama while exchanging a glance with the others.

It was not that none of them knew the answer; Naomasa was there.

She held her bamboo bottle’s reed straw in the side of her mouth as she answered.

“Generally, god of war pilot training is a lot more boring than you would think. Since operating gods of war is expensive, it’s mostly doing simulations using spells or training in the martial arts a god of war can use. ...But when they do combine with their god of war, stamina is what matters most. As long as



you're within the fuel limits, it's the pilot's stamina that keeps the machine moving. So..."

So...

"When god of war pilots have some free time, they'll go running to increase their stamina. Satomi Yoshiyasu might not do it as much as Adele, but she is often running the course around the maintenance bay."

"I see," said Asama with a nod and a look to Kimi.

Kimi turned her narrowed eyes westward. She looked at the outlines of the Odawara city visible there.

"With her lung capacity, she can sing with a male voice and still maintain the proper volume. And Yoshy has another weapon as well."

"What is that?"

"A god of war pilot knows how to continue breathing while bearing a heavy load."

Asama knew what she meant.

"So she can fully control her large lung capacity?"

"Judge. Even if she takes in a full breath, she can adjust the volume of her voice as long as she does not carelessly shout. And this will be far easier than when having her body tossed around by extreme Gs at high altitude. That should make Flatty's singing seem a bit abnormal. In other words..."

In other words...

"She should be able to sing while barely taking any breaths. That allows her to look at the lyrics and focus on singing. She doesn't have to take a quick breath between every line and reset her throat the way her opponent does. And an unwavering voice is one way of optimizing your singing for karaoke scoring."

Kani understood her enemy's combat abilities and weapons.

*...This is crazy!*

Kani had done nothing wrong. She could be called a natural-born karaoke

fighter. And she had continually trained her karaoke skills.

She knew the karaoke system inside and out and she knew exactly how to sing for it.

Overall, she could handle any form of karaoke system.

But this was an abnormal opponent.

She was specialized.

This monster's male singing style and stabilized breathing far outweighed her flaws.

And most of all *this song played to her strengths.*

So Kani doubted the situation would have worked in her opponent's favor with a different song. However...

*...I'll do my best!*

Her opponent was specialized for this song. She was a karaoke expert, but an expert in a single song.

It was not a case of 0 or 1.

It was 0 or 100.

And Kani was up against that opponent's 100. And to do that...

*...I'll do my best...!*

She realized something while repeating that phrase in her mind: *I can't just copy the way my dad sings.*

She had already analyzed the threat posed by the Student Council President and put together a plan.

She took a breath, bent backwards, and looked at the score display.

Her score was 117.

And her opponent had 102. That was a 15 point difference.

“————”

And she sang while swinging her body forward.

“How about that?”

She sang and the points changed with each word.

*...How about that!?*

“The enemy is at 121! The Satomi Student Council President is at 105! ...The enemy is pulling away!”

Kimi whistled at Adele’s words.

“Heh heh. So her opponent has started using her entire body.”

“...Her entire body?”

“Judge. She has no way of expanding her lung capacity, so the only way to increase her volume is to let out a larger breath while keeping it stable. But diaphragm control is fairly unstable. So...”

Kimi leaned back and then slowly bent her body forward.

“She does this to squish her lungs with her body’s movement. Instead of relying wholly on her diaphragm, she uses her entire body as a pump to stably expel the air.

*...That’s pretty good.*

Kimi thought, *Now she can sing more deeply too.*

Based on the scores, this was about to become a fierce back-and-forth fight. Approaching by just a point or two would not matter much. From here on...

“It's like a volcano in your pants.”

The enemy had 125.

Yoshiyasu had 109.

The gap was not growing or shrinking.

“But don't blame us.”

The enemy had 128.

Yoshiyasu had 113.

The gap had shrunk by one point.

Adele clasped her hands together in prayer. However...

“Just do the Cossack dance.”

The enemy had 132. And Yoshiyasu had...

“...116!”

The gap had grown again.

“C-can the Satomi Student Council President really do it?”

“I think she needs to give up on breasts... She only has so much growing left, Adele.”

“Please don’t look at me when you say that!”

“A-Adele, calm down,” said Asama. “Okay?”

“Don’t worry,” said Kimi. “Flatty has to know where the true battle is. After all...”

The music suddenly grew louder. That was a sign.

The next part would be sung with the music this loud.

“This is the Cossack Enemy Footrace’s most memorable and most difficult part.”

Kani prepared herself for what was to come.

She breathed in and leaned back. Yes, they were about to reach...

*...The khorosho chorus!*

In the original song, it was a group of men shouting in unison.

Of course, that had to be done alone in karaoke. It could not be done as a group.

So it all came down to volume. It was all about intensity. You won by raising your voice to a yell.

So Kani leaned back and relaxed in a way that felt like opening up her gut.

*...Dad!*

Her father had been best at this part.

He had swung his entire body and let out a roaring voice with each shout.

She understood now why he had worked so hard to sing it.

This was the time to roar and she knew what that meant.

“———!”

She formed a roar with her throat. But just before she unleashed it, she saw the Satomi Student Council President standing next to her.

*...Eh?*

Her enemy was bending back just like she was.

Yoshiyasu remembered. A clear memory came rushing back to her like an emotion.

*...Ahh!*

This was the part her sister had sung.

Her sister had so enjoyed herself while jumping around and shouting loudly.

Yoshiyasu had wondered why the Student Council President would do something so silly, but she understood something now.

You had to do that to sing this part.

And you could use that as an excuse to let out a roar.

Even someone with her sister's status could act like an idiot in front of everyone when singing this.

That was the purpose of this song.

She understood.

Back then, her sister could not have continued on without singing songs like this.

And doing that with her had been fun.

She understood now.

She could tell why her sister had sung this as a duet with her.

Her sister had hoped Yoshiyasu would be able to do the same eventually.  
Also...

*...That's right.*

This was an easy song for her to sing.

Once she started singing, she had found it matched her throat quite well, as silly as the lyrics were.

Had her sister realized this? No, it may have been Yoshiyori's doing since he had trained her.

Either way, she was grateful. Now that she realized why they had done it, she wanted to thank them.

If only she had been tolerant enough to go along with her sister back then.

But she had reached that point now.

She had made it. She was not as good as her sister and she probably did not appear to be enjoying it, but...

“————”

She let out a roar.

Yoshiyasu did it.

Her opponent was a good singer.

The difference in skill was clear. Overall, her enemy had the upper hand even with this song.

Yoshiyasu had briefly surpassed her by using what she specialized in, but her opponent had corrected for that and was now maintaining the gap between them.

Or, at times, widening that gap.

But this would be different. This was the final shouting match of the song.

*This* was Yoshiyasu's time to shine.

The enemy had a lot of points. The gap was 16 points wide.

Her opponent was so far above her.

But *here* she could catch up. She moved her body to reach the opponent further up the slope.

“———!”

She pursued.

She moved her body, raised her voice, inhaled another breath, and created a voice from the air she had quickly taken into her lungs.

She could sense something in her voice.

It may have been an old memory, or it may have been a sign that she had arrived in the present.

Either way, she ran up the slope of points. She gathered all her strength and sweat scattered from her as she roared.

“...!”

She roared like she was running full speed. And...

“—————”

The music stopped.

The first verse had ended.

A breath escaped her and her body relaxed slightly.

There was a short break before the second verse began, so she sent her gaze to the side.

She viewed the scores.

And she first saw Kani Saizou's score.

...152!

That girl had earned 5 points per khorosho.

That was a ridiculous number. But then she saw the number on the other side

of the sign frame.

“—————”

Yoshiyasu saw her own score.

“144!”

Suzu heard Adele shout the number.

...Wow...

Yoshiyasu had reduced the gap to 8 points with the ending chorus.

She had not caught up to the enemy yet, but she had reduced the gap to the single digits.

“Um, Suzu-san! Do you remember!? The Satomi Student Council President and the enemy had a 16 point gap before the chorus! Since she reduced that to 8 points...”

“I-if she keeps...the gap the same...until the end of the second verse...”

“Judge,” agreed Adele while clenching her fist. “She can catch up if she reduces it by another 8 points with the last chorus!”

Kani was sweating.

She was out of breath and a lethargic weariness filled her body. However...

“—————”

She looked to the side and saw her opponent there.

That girl was looking back at her. She wiped away her sweat with a towel and clenched her fist.

“...”

The girl held out her fist and Kani did the same with hers.

Their fists lightly bumped together.

Both of them found a smile on their face. And...



“...!”

The Satomi Student Council President resumed singing first.

Kani understood why. That girl was watching the instructions on the lyrics display.

The red coloring of the lyrics customarily began slightly before the singing was meant to begin. There was normally a time lag between when someone saw the color and when they began singing. It took 0.1 seconds or more for the visual information to reach the brain and for the person to produce their voice.

The red coloring provided some leeway for that, but the Satomi Student Council President reacted instantly.

She piloted a god of war in aerial combat, so she had good eyes.

That was why she began singing earlier.

Kani watched it happen and soon followed.

Kani had more points, making her the stronger one. So...

“...”

She bent back and got started. She sent her voice out with all her might to pull away from the enemy.

Singing voices rang out.

“Setting our sights beyond the tower.”

In the festival, on the battlefield.

“We march through the festival hour.”

Two voices pursued each other in that enclosed space.

“We gallop forth to claim our prize.”

One moved her body as if dancing and the other stood still. But...

“Their sword troops are eight or nine times our size.”

They both viewed each other and there was a solid core to their voices.

“We hit their infantry and trample them by horse.”

Their voices overlapped as they collided and separated as if to crush each other. However...

“Once every last one has been flattened on the snowy grass.”

They continued on.

Never stopping, their voices carried them ever onward.

They made it through the difficult parts.

“They get the piroshki penalty: hot spices up the ass.”

Their voices shook the wind and sweat scattered as they raced through the sound.

Nothing obstructed or disturbed the reverberation leaving their throats and it filled the enclosed space.

“Can you feel it in your guts? The Tatars can really fight.”

The gap between them did not close as they pursued each other.

But they understood something.

“If you can feel the battle.”

*This* was not where the real fight would be fought.

This standard singing was not the greatest challenge. That challenge was waiting at the end.

“Then it's tartar sauce tonight.”

The main dish was the chorus, so they prepared themselves.

“...!”

The point difference remained at 8 as they charged into the true battlefield.

Kani shouted.

*This* was the end.

She recalled her father, she thought of the friends she had sung with, and she

remembered all the time spent with those people.

She had not been trying to sing well every single time, but one thing was certain.

*...It was fun!*

She would do her best.

That fun was *here* as well.

Right now, she had to draw out everything inside herself to sing. That was something she had never done before.

And she doubted she would do it again either.

So she had to enjoy it.

So she had to do her best.

*...Yeah...!*

*I'll do my best*, she thought with pride burning in her heart. She used those words to keep that fire burning.

*...I'll do my best...!*

This was a rare experience, so she would be able to brag about it to the others.

She could say it was fun.

And it was amazing.

That it was difficult but fun.

And if she was going to say that...

“———!”

She had to do her best.

To pull away from this monster pursuing her.

So she could raise her arms and smile when she returned to those waiting for her.

“...!”

*...I'll do my best!*

Kani realized she was moving forward.

She threw herself forward to swing her body and produce the greatest voice she could.

She used all her strength to throw her sweat and everything else forward.

“————!!”

She ran up the roaring hill.

Yoshiyasu felt her memories growing clearer.

These memories of karaoke were both bitter and heartwarming.

Now that she understood everything, it felt so horribly clear but also tangible.

She thought of her sister, of Yoshiyori, and of everyone else who was there.

She felt like she had *absorbed* everything needed to be there again.

She felt like she knew exactly how any one of them would respond if she asked them a question.

*...Honestly.*

Would she experience this kind of thing again?

And each time she reached that point...

“————!!”

Would she roar like this? And when she came to understand everything...

“...!!”

Would everything become so clear and would she *absorb* everything to the point that the roaring was meaningless?

She did not know.

But there was one thing she did know.

The enemy. The enemy was right in front of her.

The point gap was within reach. What would she see beyond that single digit number?

Would she find what her sister had taught her? If so...

*...I will take it!*

She had climbed halfway up the hill of points. Now she only had to reach out and grab the enemy's back.

"...!"

Yoshiyasu roared.

Their yells coincided like two animals snapping at each other.

And...

"—————"

The second verse ended. The music grew slower and...

"Ah."

The two singers took a simultaneous breath.

A moment later, the point display changed.

Their scores appeared on the sign frame.

"...How did it turn out!?"

Adele saw the points on the sign frame. It started with Kani's.

"342 points!"

*Incredible*, thought Adele.

On average, she had done better on the second verse than the first.

She had made some adjustments after singing the first verse.

But the other side would have done the same.

*...The Satomi Student Council President actually sang the first part this time!*

So her score would be high.

With that in mind, Adele looked at the sign frame with a mixture of hope and worry.

Behind her Kimi tilted her head and said “oh?” as a number appeared.

It was the Satomi Student Council President’s score.

### **Satomi Yoshiyasu: Total Score: 340**

Yoshiyasu was aware she had lost.

It was not that she “understood” it. This was the result of using everything she had.

She had accepted the result, but it was not something she “understood” in her mind.

It was something in her heart.

*...I see.*

She felt her own inadequacy and the clear memories she had gained.

She remembered singing a part of the song *back then*.

But she had been dissatisfied with the result and felt angry. She had told everyone to never mention it again.

That had been the result of her inadequacy and her intolerance.

How had she improved since then? She had learned so much more about singing karaoke, and...

*...It was fun.*

Using every last ounce of your strength was always fun. It was the same as training and sparring.

Thinking back, they had been focused on having fun and no one had taken it seriously. If they had been competing for points like this and she had understood the technique behind singing the songs, her memory of it may have

been different.

But the past was the past. It was different from what lay ahead. The future always held value when viewed from the present.

And Yoshiyasu turned around.

“Ah...”

Kani was staring at her.

Kani could not believe she had won.

What had happened was so absurd.

Her opponent had not sung the A-Part of the first verse.

Yet that opponent had come within 2 points of her.

If that opponent had sung the entire song, Kani would have lost.

No matter what the scores said, Kani had been no match for her.

Instead of feeling like her power was lacking, she wanted to apologize to her father and friends.

*...Um...!*

The Satomi Student Council President had turned toward her, but she had no idea what to say.

She was not a true winner here. She had been given a win out of pity.

She had wanted to win with an 8 point lead, but since she had not accomplished that...

*...What do I do!?*

There was something she had wanted to say. She had wanted to say something to her opponent once the match was over.

But she no longer felt like she had the right.

“...Kani Saizou.”

Her opponent suddenly called her name, so...

“Y-yes!?”

“Um? Kani Saizou.” The Satomi Student Council President looked her dead in the eye as she spoke. “I had to do that, so this is your win. And...”

She held out her right hand.

“It was fun. Thanks.”

Kani took that hand on reflex. She nodded and thought to herself.

*...It was fun!*

That was true. She had given it her all, been pursued, and ultimately kept her lead, but she trembled when she thought back to the tension she felt while singing.

It had been fun. Just like karaoke with her father or friends was. So...

*...This is the same!*

This loss was the same as when she challenged her father or friends and lost.

It was incredible that she got to do this with the leader of a nation.

*I'm so lucky!* thought Kani.

Just then, text scrolled by on the *lernen figur* to her side.

“Let us go together,” it said.

“Eh?”

Kani and the Satomi Student Council President both looked to the *lernen figur* while still shaking hands.

“To the west and to the east,” it continued.

These were lyrics.

*...Eh!?*

For some reason, more lyrics for the Cossack Enemy Footrace were scrolling by.

“Koni-tan! Koni-tan! Look, it's the Toukai Region soundtrack for Dragoon-



emon!”

“Ohh! Now this is rare! They rebroadcast it so many times there that they got bored with the same OP and created a third through fifth verse exclusive to the Toukai region!”

“Indeed. And that localized version was used here in the Houjou region too! Now, let’s go do some karaoke! The Yogakara systems are based on the local broadcast data, so we should be able to sing all five verses of the Cossack Enemy Footrace! Let’s do it, Koni-tan!”

Yoshiyasu did not know these new lyrics.

Kani also spread her mouth horizontally while still holding her hand.

...Umm.

Yoshiyasu pulled in the lyrics sign frame that Kani had given her earlier.

“I see...”

“Wh-what is it!?”

“This. Just take a look.”

The sign frame showed two verses of lyrics, but there was a scroll bar on the right side.

And when she scrolled down...

“There’s a third verse...no, a fourth and fifth verse too.”

“I-I had no idea! What is this!?”

*I couldn’t tell you*, thought Yoshiyasu, but the lyrics completed while she was scratching her head.

“Umm,” she said again. “What happens if we only sing the first two verses of a five verse song?”

“Well, um...!” Kani smiled bitterly. “Since we didn’t even sing half the song, it isn’t scorable!”

“Oh, dear. I had a feeling this would happen.”

Asama glared at Kimi and her bitter smile. With Mitotsudaira at her side and the crossdresser and Horizon in front of her, Asama wiped off her sweat with a towel.

“Um, Kimi? If you had noticed, shouldn’t you have told her?”

Kimi narrowed her eyes and looked Asama’s way.

“Oh? You think I should have told her?”

“It would have helped, yes.”

“But do you think Yoshy would have liked beating her opponent that way?”

“...Now that you mention it, no...”

Asama wondered what would have happened if those two had been informed.

But she simply sighed because the results from Odawara had arrived.

The official result of Yoshiyasu’s duel was not a surprise.

“It looks like they’re treating that as a draw. Yoshy-chan put up a good fight.”

Yoshiyasu smiled bitterly and lowered her shoulders.

Both her duels had ended in a draw.

*...I’m just not very good at this, am I?*

But she was utterly exhausted. And she felt she had gained a lot from this.

So she considered returning to the bath to wash away her sweat. But just then...

“Um!”

Kani opened a sign frame while also approaching the bath.

“Can we exchange divine mail addresses!?”

Yoshiyasu had not expected this.

She had done so with the important people in Musashi for her official duties

and for exchanging information, but...

*...She's from another nation and it's a personal thing.*

She had a number of thoughts about this and she was cautious, but...

*...I can have the Asama Shrine Representative put together some security for me.*

Then it would not be a problem, so she nodded.

“Yes, I would like that.”

Kani cheered and smiled.

*What a nice smile, thought Yoshiyasu. My sister smiled just like that when she finished singing, didn't she?*

# Chapter 59: Seducer in a Place of Awakening

# 第五十九章

## 『寝起き場の誘い者』

設問一  
これが何に見えるかを  
第一印象で答えなさい  
配点 (踵)

## Question One

*What was your first impression*

*Of what this looked like?*

### Point Allocation (Heel)

Shigenaga felt her chest shaking.

*...Hm?*

She opened her eyes and saw a dimly-lit Far Eastern room.

The cloudy afternoon light shined in through the paper window.

This was a room in a traveler's inn within the Odawara city. She had rented it out to get some rest, but...

"I slept really well."

The vibration between her breasts was the alarm function of a sleeping spell.

Sound could have alerted others to her presence, so she had set it to vibrate.

Her pockets were all full of weapons, so she had opened the chest of her shirt and stuck the spell charm there, but...

"I ended up sleeping for about three hours."

She checked the charm and found the fan-shaped seal that functioned as a timer was completely used up.

The rest period was one hour.

The following two hours had allowed her body and Internal Blessings to recover, but she could have been attacked at any time throughout. However...

*...I had it set to wake me if an enemy approached, but things were awfully peaceful.*

Several duels had been held, so progress was being made. She opened a *sankt okno* that listed the results of the other participants.

The duels had reached the end of the second wave.

Most fighters were in their second rest period and discussing with their nations whether they should search for another opponent or withdraw.

“It’s nice when you have enough friendly nations around that a negotiated war is possible.”

People could be injured or killed in a battle. But you could only have a battle qualify as a whole “war” with a friendly nation that was focused on making peace.

*...The Far East would probably be much more peaceful if all wars could be done like this.*

Thinking that may have disqualified her as a military commander’s name inheritor.

But a commander’s strength was not just measured by their ability to strike the enemy. Their ability to minimize damages to their own forces also mattered. So she felt resolving things peacefully was a good thing. However...

“It doesn’t always work out like that.”

These nations could only hold hands and have a negotiated war because of a larger war awaiting them afterwards.

The Kantou Liberation.

None of the nations had the excess strength to fight a proper war before that.

To put it another way, without a war as large as the Kantou Liberation, the odds were good the Siege of Odawara would also have been held as a proper war.

In that case, Houjou’s list of castles would have been defeated one at a time before they negotiated and tried to make peace. That would have increased and better defined each nation’s share. It would have worn them down as nations, but they might have gained even more.

But the nations wanted to hurry to the Kantou Liberation, so they had shared their interests and viewpoints while hurrying through the Siege of Odawara.

That was partially because things had become centered on the major nation of Mouri and because Musashi held a lot of influence.

Trying to have things your way while ignoring those two nations' intentions would not help you survive in the age to come.

The other nations had decided their best bet was to cooperate and coexist with those two nations.

*...Honestly.*

Sviet Rus had a demon emperor, yet here they were accepting that a nation of vainglory and pride and a wandering vessel were crucial to the Far East.

*But, thought Shigenaga. We are at least indebted to Musashi.*

They had given Sviet Rus's emperor a dream as a ruler, gotten him to look ahead to the future, and even helped bring Former Vice Chancellor Marfa back.

And while doing that, they had gotten the Shibata forces to withdraw from Sviet Rus and they would arrange a trade route to Kantou.

Even though the trade route could introduce the possibility of an invasion of the Edo region.

If that meant Musashi trusted them, she could only call them naïve. But...

"...I wish we could be as carefree as Mogami."

Shigenaga got up.

She was not careless enough to position herself on the window side of the room. She kept her back to the closet on the wall and she took a breath.

And when she checked the results again, she saw that Mogami had been acting pretty wildly.

Yoshiaki had defeated Hashiba's Kani and Yoshiyasu had earned a draw with Houjou's Genan and with Kani again.

She doubted those battles meant much to Mogami, but if those fighters had been targeting the Musashi forces, then they were probably acting as guards.

Mogami had chosen to protect Musashi.

If another country tried to take advantage of Musashi's naiveté, the fox and the dog would put a stop to it.



Both of them were from nations with Testament descriptions of decline and they would be supported by Musashi.

If they were both working for Musashi now, they would become very troublesome.

Both foxes and dogs took good care of their families. And both Mogami and Satomi likely saw Musashi as part of their family now. So they would act as their conscience led them.

“I really wish we could give it so little thought.”

She wished Sviet Rus could just ignore the consequences.

But at the moment...

*...I should probably continue fighting...*

Shigenaga stood up. She opened one hand and gathered strength until faint ether light appeared there. She had apparently recovered a fair amount of Internal Blessings.

*In that case*, she thought while standing to the left of the window. Someone could be lying in wait between the room’s exit and the front entrance, so she would leave through the window. With that decided, she steadied her breathing.

Then an unexpected light appeared.

It was a *sankt okno* from Sviet Rus.

**Asa-no-Bu:** “Shigenaga-kun. Can you hear me?”

It was 1st Special Duty Officer “Zhong Kui” Saitou.

Shigenaga had a faint inkling what this was about, but she asked anyway.

“What do you need, Saitou-san?”

“Testament,” he replied. And after a breath, “Shigenaga-kun. You are being instructed to withdraw. ...Can you?”

*I knew it*, she thought.

She had felt some regret when she saw the results, but...

“I will obey. ...But might I ask why?”

The sense she got from the divine transmission changed.

Someone else was going to speak. And it was of course...

“Shigenaga-kun, it is I. ...First, let me congratulate you on your victory.”

Kagekatsu.

If he was handling this himself, he had to be pretty bored...no, this had to be pretty important.

“Chancellor. Why are you asking me to withdraw?”

“Testament. The situation is not looking good for Musashi.”

“Testament. Their Treasurer has lost to both Date and Houjou and the other two have each won against Mouri. That does seem a bit different from their original goal.”

“It does indeed,” agreed Kagekatsu. And after a two beat pause, “Shigenaga-kun. ...Um, may I make a suggestion?”

She already knew what their emperor wanted to say.

She was thinking more or less the same thing.

“You don’t need to worry about it, Chancellor. ...We only need to give Musashi the rights won with our victory over Houjou.”

But...

“Of course, we will take something in exchange. We can view that as our goal here.”

“...Sorry, Shigenaga-kun.”

He could not hide the happiness in his voice even as he apologized, but that was just who their emperor was. However...

“You have my thanks.”

She could hardly complain when he thanked her in such an apologetic tone.

*That's not really fair,* thought Shigenaga with a bitter smile. *This must be what Marfa likes about him.*

But it would be difficult to give her rights to Musashi as things were.

“What will we do about this?” she asked. “Will they negotiate with you back in Sviet Rus?”

“Oh, I will field this one,” said Saitou. “Shigenaga-kun? I would prefer if we avoided any negotiations with Sviet Rus itself. After all, we are supposed to be on Hashiba’s side until Sekigahara. If we are too open in our support of Musashi, Hashiba might interfere.”

“Then I just have to duel one of Musashi’s fighters and lose.”

**KageV:** “You cannot do that, Shigenaga-kun...! It would not be fair to shame you in that way!”

Why could she hear his exact tone of voice when it was only text?

But she smiled bitterly when she realized what it meant for him to intervene on her behalf like that.

“Then what will we do?”

“Testament. Sviet Rus has another slot for a fighter. We will use that to have someone fight on our behalf.”

“...You mean someone who will intentionally lose to Musashi?”

That was quite something. It would be humiliating for that person. Doing so seemed like it would destroy Sviet Rus’s dignity, but...

“Is anyone in Sviet Rus really willing to accept that?”

“No, that is the hard part,” said Kagekatsu. “We are honestly not sure how to deal with him.”

“Huh?”

She was not sure what he meant, but Saitou spoke up without trying to hide his exasperation.

“We clearly rejected his offer because he would be of no use to us, but he insisted on taking part because it is in the Testament. I doubt he stands a

chance against Musashi – or rather, he has already been defeated once – but that is why he wants revenge.”

“Hm... They sound quite brazen...”

That meant there was someone who wanted to strike back at Musashi after a previous loss.

“So we will see how this person does and, if they lose, give our rights to Musashi?”

Saitou thought that person was almost guaranteed to lose.

*Will it really work out that well?* wondered Shigenaga, but this was a suggestion from the 1st Special Duty Officer.

“Have you considered what to do if this person defeats a Musashi fighter, Saitou-san?”

“Testament. In that case, we will have no choice but to engage in international negotiations.”

If they had planned it out to that extent, she would leave it with them.

Shigenaga sighed and opened a new *sankt okno*.

She connected to the divine network containing general information on the Siege of Odawara and saw her withdrawal instructions from Sviet Rus. She removed her hat to accept.

Her Siege of Odawara had ended.

“Now, then.”

When she closed the *sankt okno*, it felt like the surrounding scene and information all carried different meaning.

This was a battlefield, but it was also Odawara.

*...I guess I'll grab something to eat and head back...*

She jumped through the open window and out below the cloudy sky.

The Odawara city was damaged a lot more than before she went to sleep, but...

“Now...”

One thing bothered her.

“How will this other person fight against Musashi?”

Narumi felt she had made an error. She had tried returning to the battlefield for Date, but...

*...This is the second rest period.*

The second wave of results was coming in and nothing much was happening.

She viewed a sign frame below the cloudy sky and saw that Musashi was in a slump.

“Will they really make it through this...?”

The screen also showed a few nations or personnel who had decided to withdraw.

Houjou’s multiple withdrawals would be a problem for Musashi.

Houjou Genan and Katou Yoshiaki, who counted as Houjou here, were both withdrawing from the battlefield. Yoshiaki’s withdrawal was especially bad because she had defeated Musashi’s Treasurer.

That meant Houjou could demand one right from Musashi.

And yet Musashi wanted a victory over Houjou so they could gain permission to enter Houjou’s ruins.

*...How is this going to turn out?*

Narumi was officially with Date, but she saw herself as part of Musashi’s side.

She knew Masamune would be generous in all this. Katakura did not matter.

*After all, she thought. I just have to attack Houjou myself.*

Something might change if Date had one of Houjou’s rights.

Narumi checked the sign frame.

The available Houjou fighters were Houjou Ujiteru, who was serving food at

the café being used as a rest spot, and Kotarou and Houjou Ujinao, who were both in Odawara Castle.

She could conclude Houjou Ujiteru would be the easiest target.

He had been repaired, but the exhaustion and damage from his previous battle would have an effect. However...

*...Since he hasn't made his move yet, he must have some kind of plan.*

Houjou Ujiteru would end his career here at the Siege of Odawara.

He would likely be involved during the Kantou Liberation, but his power as a name inheritor would end here.

So she wanted to let him fulfill that role.

"I sure have gotten soft."

After all...

"Here I am responding to a surprise attack without exterminating them."

Someone tried to charge at her from behind, so she turned around and dropped her prosthetic leg's heel on them.

She scored a direct hit.

The last things Sanada Nobuyuki saw were the colors dark brown and white.

It was a Far Eastern uniform. Specifically, the crotch of a girl's summer uniform.

He gasped.

*...Is she seducing me!?*

But now was not the time. He had to make the most of this surprise attack.

He had gone to the trouble of forcing his way into the Siege of Odawara as one of Uesugi's fighters.

That old man named Saitou had treated him like a weirdo, but what was that about?

He was only trying to live a serious life.

Yes, he had lived a serious life, been mistreated a bit within Sanada, and was now something like a janitor at Sanada Academy which had lost its main fighters... No, he was a necessary part of the academy.

But that life had left its scars.

Yes, he had no wife. What was more important for a Warring States man than a wife? Nothing, that's what.

He had thought his wife would be Honda Tadakatsu's daughter, but now that daughter was trying to become Honda Tadakatsu. He did not really get it himself, but that was what she had said and she had defeated one of his academy's strongest Celestial Dragons. That had not been pleasant news for him. It completely ruined his plan to comfort her when she returned from a devastating defeat.

But this was a separate matter. Before, he had gone to confess his feelings, but they had nearly crippled him with a group attack. He wanted to make up for that.

By fighting one of the Musashi girls who had participated in that attack, he could prove that was only a careless accident. Thus...

"Musashi giiiiiiiiirrrrrrrrrrrllllllllll!"

He charged.

It had been a serious act. Yes, a truly serious act.

So when she spread her legs vertically and revealed the crotch of her panties right in front of him, surely that was his reward for living such a serious life, right?

Yes, this had to be a reward from god, Buddha, or a bodhisattva, so he was free to look.

He entered staring mode. Oh, but he had a feeling this girl was the wife of someone else from Musashi.

"So she couldn't date me!"

As soon as he shouted that, he was hit by an attack from overhead.

Narumi buried the enemy in the ground.

It only took one hit.

She had forgotten that the Odawara city was on the ground.

She had carelessly performed an axe kick just like she would on the Musashi with its sturdy surface area.

“I probably shouldn’t have done that.”

She removed her leg and saw Sanada Nobuyuki buried there.

His upper body had entirely sunk into the dirt with his arms raised on either side of him.

She felt like she had gone too far, but he had to have been prepared if he was willing to make a surprise attack.

*...Ah.*

The results came in.

The sign frame showed her victory over Nobuyuki who counted as Uesugi.

Both of them were instructed to enter a rest period, but she also saw an instruction for Nobuyuki to withdraw.

And she tilted her head while looking at Nobuyuki’s unmoving form.

*...Why did he even bother showing up?*

And another question occurred to her.

She recalled what he had said while charging at her.

“...Musashi girl?”

That was not entirely inaccurate, but at the moment...

“I count as Date, so did he have the wrong target?”

**Shigeko:** “...”



**Shigeko:** “Um, wait...I just saw the *sankt okno*.”

**Shigeko:** “...”

**Shigeko:** “Can anyone explain this to me!?”

**KageV:** “...Um, Shigenaga-kun?”

**Shigeko:** “What is it? Hm?”

**KageV:** “Will you promise you won’t be mad!?”

**Shigeko:** “...”

**Asa-no-Bu:** “Sh-Shigenaga-kun! Is that any way to respond to your emperor!?”

**Shigeko:** “Then you can answer me, Saitou-san.”

**Asa-no-Bu:** “Well, uh...we certainly did not expect him to mistakenly attack Date...”

**Shigeko:** “And?”

**Asa-no-Bu:** “To sum up, well, it turns out he did not know what we just assumed he knew.”

**Shigeko:** “In other words, you did not fulfill your duty to explain it to him?”

**Asa-no-Bu:** “No, um, I believe, well, someone must have, uh, explained it to him...”

**Shigeko:** “...Next. Your turn.”

**Mayoress:** “Hey! Shigenaga! Are you the one bullying Kagekatsu!? Do we need to do another *privet*!? Well!? Hm!?”

**Shigeko:** “I wasn’t asking you!!”

*Things are starting to get really chaotic*, thought Yoshiyasu while soaking in the bath and drinking some honey water.

She had worked her throat hard. She had a feeling her abs would be troubling her come nighttime.

The same had to be true for Kani who was drinking sake next to her.

They were discussing the situation in Odawara while considering and hiding their respective nations' issues. Kani tended to do more listening and questioning, so...

*...I feel like a teacher...*

In a way, Yoshiyasu was the more abnormal of the two since she was Student Council President in the 2nd year, but that also reminded her that Satomi was a small enough nation to require that.

In large nations like P.A. Oda and M.H.R.R., even name inheritors were mostly fighters and specialists like Kani.

And as specialists, they were very skilled in that area of expertise.

Large nations gathered more personnel like that to grow bigger and stronger.

Small nations had to build up well-rounded personnel, which took time, and they had fewer people to start with. So...

"My upperclassman told me to observe the flow of battle!" said Kani. "You have a really good grasp of the battlefield, don't you!?"

Was that meant as a compliment? But all Yoshiyasu had done was explain the different nations' circumstances and how that related to the combat status of their representatives.

These duels were more than just clashes. They were an extension of international politics.

"In that sense, Hashiba did a good job of intervening."

"Do you mean me!?"

"You're part of it. But before even that, they placed Musashi on the Houjou side, making them an enemy of the participating nations. That did not affect Mouri since they had intended to clash with Musashi in the first place, but it made it more difficult for the other nations to openly cooperate with Musashi. Because Hashiba is watching. ...As a result, Musashi's forces had to be used against Mouri because the other nations could not oppose them."

Meaning...

“Musashi lost their chance to attack Houjou while acting as a different nation.”

“Why did we want to stop Musashi from attacking Houjou!?”

Yoshiyasu had not expected someone to ask that about their own nation.

But that was something she was having trouble working out herself.

“I can only guess, but I would say there are two reasons. When you get back, try asking someone who won’t get mad at you for asking.” Yoshiyasu raised two fingers toward Kani who was seated politely in the bath. “The first is Takigawa Ichimasu. She is at Kanie Castle which is positioned at the entrance of the Houjou ruins Musashi wants access to. If Musashi receives permission to enter the ruins, they will begin an attack on Kanie Castle, so stopping Musashi’s attack on Houjou means stopping their attack on Takigawa.”

“...Testament! So it’s an indirect thing!”

“Judge. That’s the way I see it. As for the other reason...”

She provided it while somewhat tilting her head at it.

“I wonder if Hashiba might have some reason to keep Musashi away from those ruins.”

Yoshiyasu honestly did not understand this.

But the Ten Spears had intervened at the Novgorod ruins.

And Hashiba had intervened to prevent them from entering the Sanada ruins.

Based on that...

*...Houjou’s ruins are probably the same.*

They were currently held in place by the attack on Mouri, but once Hashiba was free to act, Yoshiyasu suspected they would immediately come here to intervene.

In fact, one of the Ten Spears was already here and had defeated Musashi’s

Treasurer.

*...What is inside those ruins?*

She did not know. It annoyed her that she could not go too far with this since it could all be a misunderstanding.

But Musashi would be considering these problems too. The Vice President and the others would be following the issue. Yoshiyasu was a part of that, but she felt more like she was just helping. So...

“Well, that’s how I see it. And in that sense, Hashiba has done a good job.” Yoshiyasu pointed at Kani’s sign frame. “You’ve been instructed to withdraw.”

“Ah! You’re right! I wonder why!”

“Probably because you fought Mogami twice.”

“But I lost the first time and tied the second time!”

“You can think of us as part of Musashi. You’re a rookie and you lost the first time, but you managed to get a draw the second time. ...That’s plenty to say you have a promising future. And the Siege of Odawara ends with reconciliation after the castle is flooded. Hashiba probably sees a draw as a nice compromise.”

Meaning...

“Kani Saizou. When you get back, tell them the song was localized but you actually won. Your superiors should be happy with that.”

“The same goes for you, Satomi Student Council President! You gave yourself a handicap!”

Kani refused to be convinced otherwise on that point.

And just as Yoshiyasu tried to figure out what to do about it, the bath’s sliding door opened.

“Ookubo?”

Yoshiyasu looked back and that was indeed who she saw. The girl had already changed into her summer uniform and she had a towel draped over her prosthetic left arm instead of her stole.

“Hey, you should probably get out soon. I’ve prepared something to eat,” she

said. “Also, some other guests need that space.”

*Guests?* she wondered, but that question was soon answered. A large volume appeared next to Ookubo. No, two volumes. The first was...

“Ohh, Yoshiyasu. You’re taking a bath too?”

“Yoshiaki...!?”

When Kani heard Yoshiyasu’s exclamation, she scrambled to her feet and bowed.

The second entered the bath behind Yoshiaki in a leisurely yet sudden way.

“The Reine des Garous...!”

“Oh? It’s Satomi’s Student Council President.” The woman smiled with a hand on her cheek. “The two of us were just having a lovely chat outside. ...And we thought we would clean up before our duel.”

*...Duel!?*

Yoshiyasu gasped and checked her sign frame.

A duel request had appeared there:

**<Request: Mogami Yoshiaki vs. Masuda Motonaga>**

These two women planned to duel in some way.

*This is going to be a giant kaiju battle, isn’t it?* thought Yoshiyasu with a sigh. After all...

*...There’s no way they would do karaoke...*

The sky was beginning to change color.

The cloudy sky grew dimmer and the wind blew strongly in from the ocean.

That gust of wind blew the row of Houjou flags positioned alongside a water-filled moat.

This was the entrance of Odawara Castle. A single figure stood in the castle gate plaza.

It was Seki Masasada who wore torn clothing.

She carried a few items in front of the barricades in the plaza.

Large barrels sat on an oddly small cart which she moved with her gravitational control.

She spoke to the barricades in front of her.

“Excuse me. ...Will you let me pass? My master wishes for results.”

“That will not happen!” shouted a voice atop the gate.

It was a Mouse. That Houjou representative in a female ninja outfit was Kotarou.

She frowned at Seki’s clothing.

“What do you think you are doing here dressed like that!?”

“Testament. ...Like I said, I would like to defeat someone from Houjou and take their rights.”

“...What about Ujiteru-sama?”

“I looked for him but could not find him.”

“You couldn’t find him?”

“I thought he was in the café, but...”

Seki rolled one of the large barrels forward with gravitational control.

Her damaged parts groaned, but she managed to turn the barrel on its side and open the lid.

Its contents were dumped out onto the plaza’s gravel.

“This is Lord Ujiteru’s automaton cowl and damaged parts.

“...!” Kotarou frowned. “He fled without protecting the clan leader!?”

“I have determined he has some kind of plan. ...What will you do, Lady Kotarou?”

“...You leave me no choice!”

Kotarou swung both her arms. Several sign frames opened in response. They

spiraled around and rose up around the Mouse.

“Fuuma Formation, stand up.”

With those words, all of the barricades in the plaza moved.

What had been disguised as stone walls moved their jackets and materials from within as they revealed their true form. Canopies flew into the air and below them...

“Gods of war...and...”

There were 8 heavy gods of war and 32 automatons. But they all had one notable trait: the lack of a face.

They only had structures with holes opened for sight and hearing devices.

They were remote controlled models and they were being controlled by...

“Fuuma Kotarou. Prepare yourself.”

As soon as she said that, the roar of a cannon shook the air.

The blast had come from one of Seki’s barrels and it tore through a god of war.

Seki drew a long knife from her apron and fired a cannon blast.

She had brought in 5 barrels. One of those had contained Ujiteru’s parts and three of the others contained weapons.

She was up against gods of war and automatons. Remote-controlled ones. It was only a Mouse controlling them.

*...For that I am grateful.*

She would have been hesitant with a human opponent. As an automaton, she would have felt the need to pay them respect.

Of course, she would have been hesitant with an automaton opponent as well. She would have worried that she was too flawed to be their opponent.

When facing them, it was best to *let them defeat themselves* or distance herself from the act by sniping them.

When sniping, she could close her eyes in the instant she fired.

She could look through the scope afterwards and, if they lay collapsed on the ground, she could simply assume someone else had done it.

She could assume her Princess or the others had assisted her yet again.

Even among the Mouri *Belle de Marionnettes*, she was a weakling who could not even strangle livestock.

While on the battlefield, she was constantly questioning whether she was fit to be there.

But with an automaton enemy, there was no hesitation.

They were an enemy, so they were not one of her own kind.

She would not question whether she was fit to be there. She would think it had to be her.

After all, they were an enemy and they were not a person. They were not a life everyone had raised.

Her fellow *Belle de Marionnettes* and her Princess would not need to dirty their hands.

She could defeat them without worrying. And she could fulfill her duty. So...

“————”

Seki saw her right arm (the one holding the long knife) flying through the air. It had been severed.

Seki had seen an enemy automaton jump to her right.

The faceless opponent carried a scythe-like outward-curving blade in her right hand. That kind of scythe sword was used to get the tip of the blade to the enemy faster than a normal sword, capture them with it, and cut them. The center of gravity was on the tip and the blade would be diverted depending on how the air resistance hit it, so it was difficult for humans to use.

You could call it an automaton weapon.



It had just severed Seki's right arm. And in front of her...

"Ah..."

Her cannon blast had been wasted.

The 8 gods of war were no longer in front of her.

Those 8 giant forms had scattered to either side and ducked low.

They were not just crouched down. They were preparing to rush toward her. She could tell they would attack in waves, with 4 out front and 4 waiting in the rear.

Seki concluded the evasive action had been oddly fast for heavy gods of war.

They had likely been given a power system that far surpassed human-scaled muscular strength. These gods of war were meant to dodge cannon blasts and fight with their physical strength.

With no one onboard, they could use forceful actions and coordination.

With Kotarou in control, the gods of war were given ninja movements.

A simple cannon blast did not work even as a surprise attack.

And the 32 automatons worked to fill the gap.

Meanwhile, Seki had been slow to react because she had been watching the one who leaped in first.

Severing her right arm must have been a feint that caused actual harm.

*...She had just one of them jump in as an immediate counter that would draw my attention.*

Having them all rush in would have been noticed and putting together a formation that quickly was not easy.

Kotarou must have sent the one in as a diversion and used that short time to build a formation for the others to rush in.

Seki noticed the enemy automatons did not all wield the same weapons or take the same stances.

There were two units of them. A group of 8 took the lead in both units. 4 of

them fired guns at Seki, 2 in the lead held her in place, and the 2 following them held spears.

She would be shot, held in place, and then finished off.

“And then...”

The one that had leaped in to her right had drawn a weapon.

She was too far away to use the scythe sword and she would not have been able to eliminate the momentum of jumping in, so she would be using a pistol.

The bullet flew toward Seki. Rapid-fire gunfire also arrived from in front of her.

So she moved. She lightly lowered the long knife in her left hand.

“Now, then.”

And she moved forward.

The damaged automaton took her first step forward.

Nine things happened as if the sound of her foot in the gravel had been a cue.

They happened to the 8 automatons targeting her and the one trying to shoot her from the side.

“—————”

Their bodies suddenly burst and broke.

The sound was their multi-hinge joints breaking and their outer shells shattering. It sounded a lot like an eggshell cracking and as the metal fibers tore...

“———!”

Their 9 bodies burst apart like blossoming flowers.

Kotarou saw what had happened but did not understand it.

The one thing she understood was that she did not understand it. That was

all. After all...

...*Why!?*

The fight had been very strange from the beginning.

Even the initial automaton leaping in at Seki had been. That attack had targeted Seki's head.

So why had it severed her right arm instead?

The automaton's aim had been accurate since the jump had been along a straight line.

The time difference measurements of the sight devices told Kotarou that Seki herself had not moved.

But Kotarou realized something only now.

"The long knife..."

Seki had been holding it in her right hand. That was why that arm had been severed.

So why was she now holding the thick blade in her left hand?

"It would seem you do not know when I switched hands."

The next rush arrived just as Seki spoke.

There were 8 automatons and they made a coordinated attack with guns, blades, and martial arts. However...

"I shall advance 3 steps."

With those words, the rush passed Seki by.

But *nothing happened* to Seki

Some of those in the rush were meant to hold Seki in place. And Kotarou was controlling them. She used the data from the sight devices and other sensory devices to crush Seki with surefire movements.

"But..."

The 8 automatons passed her by without anything happening and then they "blossomed" below the cloudy afternoon sky.

Three gods of war rushed in soon thereafter. One straight ahead of her and one from either side.

But Seki...

“Step 2.”

...said that as the gods of war reached her.

The first one swung an anti-god of war short sword from a meter above the ground. It reached Seki's left arm.

“...Oh?”

The arm was severed at the upper arm. The slash skimmed just past her torso.

The god of war on the right threw a punch.

It smashed the left shoulder that had acted as the base of her severed arm and her body tilted to the side. But...

“Ah...”

Kotarou saw something happen to the two gods of war that had attacked Seki. Their weapon and arm flew toward their own body.

The giant arm and sword sank into their own chest or gut and scattered their body's contents.

“...!”

Two giant metal flowers blossomed in the castle gate plaza.

...*Huh!?*

Kotarou saw the destruction of the gods of war. She had never seen anything destroyed like that before.

The gods of war had committed suicide.

It was an abnormal action.

A god of war's actions were controlled by its spell OS. That control would ensure it did not destroy itself by rejecting or preventing the selection of actions that would do so.

But these gods of war had behaved differently.

They should have been under her control, but they had instead destroyed themselves.

It was almost like...

“A virus...!?”

“Looks like Seki has finally gotten her engine revving.”

Terumoto spoke with the Pension Versailles behind her on the makeshift plaza built southeast of Odawara.

Mouri-01 placed a glass of barley tea on the side table next to her. She glanced at the book that Terumoto was reading while seated on a bench.

“Is that the history of the Roi-Soleil’s mistresses, Princess?”

“I don’t have much of a choice since I promised to inherit every last one of their names. ...So I guess I have no one to blame but myself.”

Terumoto then turned toward Odawara Castle.

She was on a small hill, but Odawara Castle was even higher than the Odawara city.

She could not see the gate, but...

“*Belle de Marionnettes* are mass-produced, but due to discrepancies in component quality, some of them have faulty OSs, power systems, or outer shells.”

“Those slight defects can generally be compensated for with our other functions, but she is a rare case where everything was off, all the way down to the soul at her core.”

With that, Mouri-01 raised her right hand.

Her hand carried something white on a plate.

“Would you like a daifuku, Princess?”

“Oh, I would, I would. We’re going full Far Eastern today, aren’t we?”

“Because you seemed dissatisfied with the meal last night.”

“That I was.” Terumoto did not hide her thoughts, but she did look up when she heard a metallic noise from the north. “Odawara Castle must be a sight to behold right now.”

“To her, her components are entirely disposable. ...Her face, arms, legs, torso, and even OS are ‘off’, so they have been replaced countless times already. But whenever her core enters them, something always ends up ‘off’ yet again. ...So being destroyed on the battlefield is a form of hope for her. Because next time, there might be nothing ‘off’ about her.”

“A *Belle de Marionnette* that does not fear destruction, hm?”

“In the past, it seemed like she was harming herself because she actually wanted destruction...but that changed once you scolded her.”

“Well, I had to.” Terumoto spread her mouth horizontally. “Those components are expensive. And when she’s always swapping out parts, it’s hard to recognize her. I’m bad enough as it is at remembering what people look like, so remembering a *Belle de Marionnette*’s hand or foot is essentially impossible. I just told her I would cover all the costs for the *Belle de Marionnettes* that serve me, but she had to quit getting destroyed so much.”

“...But I’m impressed you noticed her special abilities, Princess.”

“That was just a coincidence.” Terumoto took a sip of the barley tea.

“Remember the cat the other *Belle de Marionnettes* couldn’t catch? The one that climbed up on the roof and couldn’t get down. When it fell, the rest of you all failed to catch it and ended up in a pile, but Seki jumped in and caught it. I had a thought when I saw that.”

That being...

“She can’t move like normal *Belle de Marionnettes* can, but maybe she could move in ways normal *Belle de Marionnettes* can’t. ...So I had her fight and the results were immediate.”

Terumoto held her right hand forward a bit. And...

“No matter how much you all attacked, you couldn’t hit her. ...Your

movements were optimized and accurate, while hers responded with something just off of optimized and accurate. You tried to predict her movements as those of a *Belle de Marionnette* and she was trying to move in exactly that way, but there was something 'off' about those movements and you couldn't hit. ...But it was the opposite for her."

Terumoto grabbed the empty air with her right hand. And she pulled that empty air back toward her.

"She wanted an accuracy that was not 'off', so she was always looking to that. And to do so, she simulated it not just thousands but trillions and quadrillions of times. Because she couldn't live her everyday life if she truly remained 'off'. ... Do you get it? She wanted to live an everyday life despite being 'off'. So felt that way every single day even as she wore clothes that did not quite fit and went to sleep in the mornings. And do you remember why she did not attack all of you even once?"

"She was worried it would be wrong for someone like her to harm us, wasn't she?"

"Testament." Terumoto nodded. "She's only recently learned to fight properly. But her true value is seen when she fights *Belle de Marionnettes* or *Lourd de Marionnettes*. Because she has a way of defeating them without actually attacking them. That is..."

That is...

"She interferes with their movements and power systems so they destroy themselves."

Seki moved forward.

She opened the final barrel behind her. It contained...

"Spare arms."

She purged the broken left shoulder and arm and did the same for the right.

She pulled the new arms toward her with gravitational control and attached them with her torn maid uniform caught in the joints.

“————”

The next automaton rush arrived.

There were 8 of them, but the bullets fired by their gunners arrived first.

She did not care.

*...They will not hit.*

She was “off”.

Normally, machines would use their optimization and accuracy when confronting each other.

And when an automaton fought another automaton, they assumed their enemy would have that same optimization and accuracy.

So when attacking, they would assume the enemy’s evasion and defense would be done with optimization and accuracy.

But Seki’s optimization and accuracy were “off”.

She was defective.

She was trying to be optimal and accurate, but it did not quite work.

And that was very bad news for the enemy. Both sides would normally have the same optimization and accuracy, so she would be “off” where the enemy expected perfection.

This was the same.

The enemy’s bullets grazed her face and tore through her side.

But it was not fatal. The more precisely they aimed, the more her “offness” would protect her.

And she had been trained in how to respond to this.

There had been a time when she had wanted to move just like her fellow *Belle de Marionnettes*, found she could not even walk right, and tried to at least not be in the way.

How did those accurate and optimal *Belle de Marionnettes* operate their systems to move?



What operations of their systems would lead to what movements?

She knew the answer because she could not do it herself.

...So...

The rest was easy. She only had to help the automatons approaching her.

The blades coming to touch her were linked back to their artificial muscles and power system. By reflecting those just a bit, she could throw “off” their optimal and accuracy and create different movements.

The force meant to destroy her was turned back against them.

That was for the best.

Someone like her could never think of attacking them herself.

A defective model must never defy a proper model.

So she had them destroy themselves.

They were proper models, so they had the right to destroy a proper model like themselves.

She was fine with being defective. Because her master had said it was fine. So...

“I will advance 5 steps.”

Seki advanced.

Gods of war approached. She knew how they would move. They used the same optimal as an automaton.

“So...I will give my right arm and side to your thrusting blade.”

In exchange, she used gravitational control to swing her long knife up toward the god of war’s visible finger joint.

In that case...

“I can predict that immediately pulling your arm back to dodge is the optimal action.”

*...That is exactly what happened.*

So she fired a cannon from behind her.

“Do not worry.”

*A defective unit's cannon blast cannot blow through a proper model. It will only graze the inside of your elbow joint and shake your arm.*

*But when that happens, your accurate movements will cause you to quickly pull your arm back.*

*As a result, the short sword you hold will stab you in your chest. But the distortion to your will elbow will remain, so your accurate movements will lead you to release the blade vertically. And then...*

“—————!”

The god of war blossomed.

As a proper model, it destroyed itself with the kind of accuracy one could be proud of.

*...Oh, what a waste.*

If only she had come here earlier.

She felt it had been a mistake to make Musashi's fighters her top target.

She had thought it would work since one of their fighters had a prosthetic arm. She had planned to try sniping and, if that failed, attempt close-quarters combat where she could affect the girl's prosthetic arm.

She would of course have messed with the arm as a means of attack, not defense or evasion.

She would have had her opponent defeat herself with her own arm.

But that opponent had been incredible. She had not viewed her prosthetic arm as a prosthetic.

She had treated it like a weapon or a detachable part of her own body. There had been no accuracy or optimizing there, so she was not sure why it even had to be fake.

It had been a strange feeling. It was neither a proper model nor a defective model. In a way, that may have been a good description of humans like her Princess.

It was a tricky thing.

So this was much simpler and easier.

The enemy was more powerful and numerous, but they were proper models. And they were attacking with brute force.

They were accurate and optimal.

“That is good.”

Seki looked to the automatons and gods of war surrounding her while keeping their distance.

But it was too late.

She had weapons behind her: spare arms, legs, and...

“A face.”

Seki’s face devices had been damaged and bent by what attacks had reached her, so she used her right hand to replace them. She removed the sensory devices located in front of her artificial brain block and tossed aside the old and defective face.

She used her left hand to attach a new face.

It too was defective. But it was new.

Her Princess worked with the PR Committee to broadcast the shows “Angry Weather Forecast” and “Moto’s Kitchen” and she used some of her pay for these things.

It was such a waste. All the canola oil her Princess used on Moto’s Kitchen also seemed like a waste, but they were likely thinking within the show’s budget. She hoped it was similar for her parts.

“Now.”

Seki advanced. She moved forward.

*...Here I go.*

Just then...

“Send in reinforcements...!”

Several silhouettes jumped to the top of the castle gate. They were gods of war and automatons. They lined up along the gate’s tile roof as if they weighed nothing.

*...How orderly.*

Seki could not help but marvel at how orderly these proper models were.

So she nodded and spoke before the seemingly-endless waves of enemy attacks.

“It would be a waste for you to spend your time on a defective model like me.”

Kotarou sensed maximum danger when she saw the enemy approaching.

*...I will stop her!*

Houjou was a nation that used automatons and gods of war to fight.

They produced automatons and exported localized versions to other nations.

Their value was in their accuracy and their optimization.

Thus, defective models were always discarded upon discovery. That was how they managed product quality.

But this person overturned that value.

Kotarou was aware of this automaton’s origin. Hexagone Française exported automatons as well.

One of those most likely had a distortion in her core. The distortion was too minor for a boot-up check to detect, but it must have manifested itself thanks to the influence of Hexagone Française as a nation.

It would have begun as a small distortion. But how had she viewed that discrepancy while living among so many proper models? Many attempts to

correct the distortion had only exacerbated it.

This could not have happened by coincidence alone. Nor could it have happened by training alone. It was a combination of both. And...

“Your master accepted it, didn’t they!?”

For an automaton, their master’s approval trumped their *raison d'être*.

Seki had accepted her distortion and those around her had helped.

Even though she could have just been discarded at the earliest stages.

Hexagone Française had not done so, but that was likely because they had needed as many automatons as possible – even defective ones – for their conflicts with M.H.R.R., nonhumans within their own borders, and the Hundred Years’ War.

How much had the distortions accumulated and grown to create such a monster?

But there was just one thing Kotarou had to do now.

“I will stop you...!”

This was Mouri’s anti-Houjou trump card.

Kotarou had thought the Reine des Garous was the only real threat, but she had been wrong.

This enemy could not be allowed near Ujinao. Ujinao was human on the inside, but she had an automaton body.

There was a chance something could happen. So...

“More reinforcements...!”

Flowers blossomed in the castle gate plaza.

Those metal flowers were created as Seki walked.

That floral path could not be allowed to reach Ujinao. And on Kotarou’s pride as a proper model...

“I will not let you pass...!”

Seki crossed a field. It was a windy and deserted field of blossoming flowers.

“Now, then.”

Bullets were approaching. As were enemies and blades. But she spoke into the blowing wind.

“I may be defective, but even I have a *Belle de Marionnette* spirit.”

These words contained that spirit.

“The doubts of a single component.”

She continued her words.

With incoming attacks punctuating her steps and her torn clothing fluttering in the wind, she brushed back her hair and spoke.

“A defective unit cannot stand against and walk through the warring states’ current of abandonment.”

She recited the words.

“A defective unit is accustomed to having her body and OS damaged, abandoned, and replaced.”

The bullets did not hit her. The enemy sliced and crushed to take her body from her, but...

“A defective unit is already prepared and knows her body’s limits.”

All who came at her self-destructed and blossomed. She too was torn into within the din of explosions and tearing. However...

“A defective unit can use her body and hands for her master.”

Everything blossomed behind her. Even her own components broke and scattered, but she replaced them whenever they did.

She simply moved forward. And...

“A defective unit is already prepared and will use all of herself to strike back.”

Shadows flew like scattering leaves behind her.

The weapons she had brought took flight thanks to her gravitational control.

“Now.”

Once more, she brushed back her hair, but she now held a long knife in each hand.

“A defective unit...”

She faced forward.

“...does not fear...”

Her hair danced in the wind.

“...becoming trash...”

She resumed walking.

“...and faces forward as she goes.”

She advanced.

“Looks like it’s over,” said someone looking up at the bath’s ceiling while soaking in the tub.

It was the Reine des Garous. She and her hair took up about a third of the large tub.

But she was not the only one soaking there.

She slowly lowered her gaze toward the person at the opposite end.

The person across from her was Yoshiaki. She did not hide her nine tails and let them soak in the water. A tray containing a sake bottle and cup floated in front of her.

“With that, my role is more or less complete.”

“Heh heh. Yes, I suppose so.”

“So...what will you do?”

“Testament.” The Reine des Garous nodded. “If I wanted to duel Houjou Ujinao, you would stop me, wouldn’t you?”

“And if I went to stop Seki, you would have stopped me.”

“Seki has gone to defeat someone from Houjou.”

“And what will you do?”

“Defeating someone from Musashi might be nice.”

“You already lost to them once, didn’t you?”

“Testament.” The Reine des Garous smiled a little. “I could always make up for that, you know? I could sniff out their merchant or duel that girl taking a break in the changing room.”

“You can make do with me. I am technically on Musashi’s side.”

“That you are,” agreed the Reine des Garous with a smile. She pulled over her tray floating on the water. “Would you like some of this?”

“Then you can have some of this. ...Is that Far Eastern wine?”

“Testament. Some from my daughter’s land was on the menu.”

“Mito, hm?”

Yoshiaki raised a hand of thanks and accepted the wine from the Reine des Garous.

In exchange, she poured some of her bottle’s contents into the other woman’s glass.

“Is this Houjou sake?”

“It is from Musashi,” said Yoshiaki. “Rice grown inside Musashi is used as a base and the brewing is done at the Asama Shrine. It must have a purifying effect because it affects a nonhuman like me pretty strongly. I quite like it.”

“I see. In that case...” The Reine des Garous wet her lips with the sake in her glass. “If my daughter becomes a concubine along with the Asama shrine maiden, purifying effects like that could put her at a disadvantage... The time may have come for me to teach her a good plan for that.”

“Such as?”

“Testament. If she is going to practice with chicken skewers, it is actually better to use chicken meatball skewers.”



“Would kiritanpo not work?”

“M-my! Just a slight misspelling away from disaster!”<sup>[5]</sup>

“No one is misspelling anything.”

“Testament. And you really mustn’t sever them. You need to treat them with care.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about, but it sounds like a complex situation.”

Just as Yoshiaki sighed, a new result was added to the sign frame.

“It seems we have a result for Kotarou and your Seki Masasada.”

“Testament. I can see it. Winner: Seki Masasada,” said the Reine des Garous. “But Seki has been instructed to withdraw. She must have been pretty badly damaged.”

Kotarou was held in someone’s arms.

Her own tiny arms held a short sword the automaton had dropped.

*...It even got through to her...!*

The blade she held was stabbed up to the guard inside her seated opponent’s stomach.

But that opponent held Kotarou in arms that barely kept their original shape.

She could not move.

But she heard a straining sound as the automaton stood up.

And during that unsteady standing motion, she heard several components and lots of lubricant oil spilling from the automaton’s body. She also heard breaking metal and felt herself wobble.

But the automaton had stood up.

Next, that automaton placed Kotarou on the ground.

As she did, Kotarou saw the flower garden of destruction around her.

She had sent in a total of 18 gods of war and 72 automatons, but they had all destroyed themselves.

Of course, to do all this, that defective model would have to have taken an equal level of damage. But...

“It takes a proper model to destroy a proper model. ...That is something I cannot do.”

“That’s not-...!”

*Wait*, thought Kotarou. This opponent was stating the truth, not being ironic.

She was a defective model who would hesitate if told to “defeat” a proper model.

That was what had led to the result before them.

That flower garden of fragments had all come from self-destruction.

Among the broken components and frames, the colors of external armor and torn armored clothing were scattered like flowers.

There was wind. A powerful gust blew in from the ocean.

That air current blew through the automaton’s hair as she turned her back.

“Until we meet again.”

“You’re leaving!? Shouldn’t you call for assistance!?”

“A defective model must not call for her master.”

But...

“My Princess says our pride and vainglory leave room for defective models.”

“What...?” asked Kotarou.

The automaton creaked and swayed as she walked, but she looked back over her shoulder to answer.

“Hexagone Française and Mouri are not shelves to display well-made dolls. They are a toy box in which even defective models are thrown. A toy box belonging to the Roi-Soleil and my Princess.”

She turned her back in the wind once more.

Kotarou exhaled as she watched the automaton leave.

“I will not accept it! ...I may have lost the duel, but I did stop you!”

The Mouse shouted at that creaking and swaying back.

“All that matters is that I kept you from reaching Ujinao-sama...!”

“Hey, Mouri-01.”

Terumoto looked up into the cloudy sky that was gaining the colors of evening.

A dull scarlet was mixing in with the clouds.

She moved her eyes to follow the flowing clouds and the colors of the sky visible through them.

“How about we move to the camp entrance?”

“We mustn’t, Princess. ...She will return, so let’s trust in her.”

“Ahh, vainglory sure ain’t easy. “

“Testament. But a lot of people follow you because of that. Besides...”

“Besides?”

“Testament,” continued Mouri-01. “If you went out to meet her, she would get embarrassed and not have anyone to hide behind. Right now, you need to fix your windswept hair and stack up your books.”

“At any rate, this means one of Houjou’s rights goes to Mouri.”

Yoshiaki thought about this while she got up from the bath.

*...Does this mean Mouri has preserved their reputation?*

It meant a lot that the western nation of Mouri had gained a hook to involve themselves with the eastern nations.

If anyone tried to take Houjou’s right from Mouri, they would almost certainly put a stop to it.

So it was best to assume that right was a sure thing for Mouri.

Given that, the only remaining problem was the two women here.

“Hm,” said Yoshiaki as she shook the water off her tails and turned around.

She spoke to the Reine des Garous who was drying off with two towels.

“What rules shall we use for our duel?”

“I’m fine with a physical battle, but in that case...” She pointed toward the entrance. “How about we go to Odawara Castle. We should see some battles on the way. When we do, we can adopt their combat methods for our duel. If we take multiple duel methods into account, we can find something that makes for a fair fight. I mean, I would have far too much of an advantage in a normal battle.”

“Is that so? ...I was thinking the same thing about myself. A devious fox would never lose to brute force.”

“Heh heh. What a scary person you are.”

“I could say the same about you,” said Yoshiaki with a bitter smile.

She slid open the door while planning to get dressed and see what kinds of duels were underway between here and Odawara Castle.

“Yoshiyasu? The Reine des Garous and I are about to leave here, so-...”

She was going to ask the girl what she would do, but she trailed off when she saw Yoshiyasu, Kani, and Ookubo having a duel of sorts.

The three of them had dragged a ping pong table to the center of the changing room and they were engaged in a high-speed rally.

When Yoshiaki appeared, they all looked over and Yoshiyasu missed the ball.

The hard paper ball flew to the floor and Ookubo turned the blackboard containing the score toward Kani. And...

“We’re in our rest period, so we decided to have some fun,” said Ookubo. “What’s that look for?”

“I see,” said Yoshiaki with a nod, but the Reine des Garous spoke up behind her.

“...This is it. This will be our duel.”

# **Chapter 60: Duelers at the Hot Spring**

## 第六十章

### 『温泉場の決闘者達』



ん——？  
配点（甘キレ……！）

*Hmm?*

## **Point Allocation (Somewhat Mad...!)**

Ookubo looked up to the ceiling in the bathhouse changing room.

*...I have no idea what's going on anymore...*

Exchanging divine mail addresses with Kani had been confusing enough, but it had only gotten worse from there.

She had yet to tell Kani or Yoshiyasu what had happened *here* with Seki. The automatons had cleaned up afterwards and she had recovered the short sword stabbed into the floor and everything else.

She had sent her bloody stole to be washed and the wound below her collarbone was sealed with a charm. She felt some slight heat there, but it was hidden by the towel she wore in place of her stole.

Yoshiyasu and Kani seemed to have gotten to know each other. Kani still seemed to keep some distance from Ookubo, but Ookubo appreciated that. It allowed her to keep doing things her own way. *The upperclassmen have no trouble keeping me from doing that, which is such a pain...*

But the biggest source of confusion was occurring right in front of her.

There was a ping pong table and a blackboard for writing the score. She tapped each of them once and spoke.

“And with that, the Reine de Garous and Mogami Chancellor will begin their ping pong duel.”

*And with that? What am I saying?* she thought.

But this was the duel those two had decided on.

“Let’s go over the rules. Are you both familiar with ping pong?”

“Testament. I am.”

As for Mogami Yoshiaki...

“Yes, my Ushuu is a hot spring town. This game is a popular form of



entertainment during the winter.”

That was good to hear.

“Judge.” Ookubo nodded and opened a sign frame. “As a special rule, whoever scores 5 points first will be the winner. You can score points when you change who serves. Miss a serve and it changes immediately. ...Does that sound good?”

“Testament. This entire battle is approaching the end, so a lengthy duel that slows everything down would be a bad idea.”

“True,” agreed Yoshiyasu from behind Yoshiaki. She sat in a chair with her arms crossed. “We still have the Kantou Liberation afterwards. Delaying progress in blocks of 30 minutes would be a problem. ...Of course, that ignores the possible benefit to Mouri or Mogami.”

“Heh heh. Don’t worry about that,” said the Reine des Garous. “I also want to end this duel as quickly as possible and get back. The bath washed off some of his scent.”

Ookubo was not sure what that meant, but she had a feeling her upperclassmen would understand.

“Anyway,” said Ookubo while using both hands to point at the Reine des Garous and Mogami Chancellor. “Just to be clear, this is cutting it pretty close as far as the Testament is concerned.”

There was a note mentioning that this sport was later developed from tennis. And there were records from the Age of the Gods saying it was a hot spring sport. But tennis itself was still not fully historically established, so...

“This kind of sport is generally enjoyed while hidden indoors, isn’t it?”

“Well, you can’t exactly play it outside...”

The wind would affect the balls too much since they were so light.

That was another reason that ping pong was a form of indoor entertainment at the places that offered it. It still could not be officially advertised, so you had to go to the entertainment facilities and ask if you could play some “you-know-what”.

*...It's a banned service...*

“Heh heh. But we must submit the duel method to the Siege of Odawara headquarters, right? So I made sure to talk around the specific method. ... Anyone with good intuition should know what it is we’re doing.”

“Hey, Mitotsudaira, can you explain this description the Reine des Garous sent about her duel with Mogami Yoshiaki?”

“Huh? What does it say? Let me see.”

- **Duel Method: We will face each other in a closed room, grab and vigorously move a stick with rubber on the end, and send balls bouncing back and forth until one of us wins.**

“Heh heh. Balls! Bouncing back and forth! O-oh, dear. Get too into it and you’ll lose! C’mon, Mitotsudaira! Asama! We can reproduce what I’m imagining using these bamboo poles! Grab them and vigorously move them around! Now, foolish brother! Horizon! Let’s go!”

“Kimi, what are you shouting about now!? And where are you three going with those bamboo poles!?”

Male and female students could be heard screaming on the other side of the festival stands. Those three were apparently chasing the guests around with those processed bamboo poles. *This will undoubtedly hurt the Student Council's approval rating*, she thought, but there was no helping that.

Mitotsudaira sighed and returned to her senses.

“What is my mother doing!?”

Her mother was vigorously moving around a stick with rubber on the end.

For those warmup exercises, she swung a penhold racket that you pinched between your fingers.

*...It sure is light.*

Swishing sounds came from her and the Mogami Chancellor and Musashi's glasses-wearing Representative Council Head looked to each of them in turn.

"Which one of you will serve first?"

"The Reine des Garous can do that," said the Mogami Chancellor.

The Reine des Garous nodded.

"Then I shall."

She caught the ball the Musashi Representative Council Head threw to her and then she tossed it straight up.

"Here I go...!"

Kani watched the attack.

This was her first time seeing the Reine des Garous up close.

Since she was from P.A. Oda, she had of course heard of the partial destruction of IZUMO.

This woman had destroyed a portion of the floating island and then jumped down from it unharmed.

She looked like a kind lady. She really did. But...

"—————"

She launched an attack in an instant. The strike looked like a bullet as it struck the falling ball. It made a high-speed bounce and popped up in front of Mogami Yoshiaki.

*...Yoshiaki-sama...!*

Yoshiaki did not move. But her hair shook and the ball hit the wall behind her.

"...!?"

It embedded itself there. That phenomenon was the result of an impossibly rapid spin. The rotation speed more than the solidness of the ball had created enough mass to tear into the wall.

And the Representative Council Head raised her left arm and blew a whistle.

“1 point for Mogami!”

The point had gone to Yoshiaki.

“Eh?” said the Reine des Garous, so the Representative Council Head pointed at her and shouted.

“Don’t use your Silver Cross!”

Ookubo thought:

*...I had a feeling something like this would happen!*

“Hit the ball with your racket! What moron uses a divine weapon here!?”

But the target of her question, the Reine des Garous, hid the Silver Cross behind her back and placed her left index finger on her mouth.

“Hmm?”

She tilted her entire body as if to say she did not know what Ookubo was talking about.

“P-playing dumb isn’t going to help!”

“But, um, that’s not allowed?”

“Wait, didn’t you say you were familiar with ping pong?”

“I am familiar with it.”

Ookubo noticed something about how she said that.

*...Ah.*

“How familiar?”

“Testament. I have seen people play it before. Yes.” She kept a straight face.

“But am I really not allowed to use my Silver Cross?”

Ookubo had a feeling she should explain all the rules.

On the other side of the table, the Musashi Representative Council Head used a sign frame to explain the rules.

Yoshiaki sighed in her heart as she watched.

*...I can see why she is known as the Reine des Garous...*

*This could be trouble, she thought.*

It had been a surprise attack, but even though she had seen the Silver Cross appear, she had been unable to see the other woman swinging it.

This went beyond moving quickly. Moving way too fast was the standard for her.

Her standard speed was different from other people. So what would happen when she further increased her speed?

*...I have heard the Mito Lord did manage a win against her...*

Did that just mean the daughter was a monster too?

But Yoshiaki was not to be trifled with when it came to being monstrous. She was a nine-tailed fox, a great monster fox.

“Hm.”

The Reine des Garous was currently learning the rules from the Representative Council Head.

That included how to swing the racket, how to serve, and how it all fit together. Since Kani was saying “ohh” while listening in, that Representative Council Head’s explanation must have been quite good.

But looking at the Reine des Garous listening to those words was enough to tell what tactics she would use.

“A quick attack...”

The racket she had chosen was a pen type. The grip had a rectangular cross section and it was held like a pen.

It could be manipulated with the fingers, so it was easy to control when making a forehand strike. On the other hand, it was a little difficult to catch the ball with a backhand strike.

Beginners were better off first leaning to attack and defend with forehand hits, so the pen type was a decent selection since it was easy to hold.

And based on the Silver Cross, this woman would focus on offense. She would move forward.

It was hard to put much force behind a hit with the pen style, but that was a trivial problem for the Reine des Garous's strength. In a head-on rally, Yoshiaki had a very real possibility of being overpowered.

"Now..."

Yoshiaki spun the racket in her hand and grabbed it again.

Her racket's grip was the shake style with a circular cross section. It was held from the side.

Controlling it was much like waving a fan. Precise finger movements were almost entirely unusable, but since it could be moved with the wrist, it was easy to use during backhand hits.

It allowed for more force behind hits, so it was a good choice when up against such an overpowering opponent.

*I can use this to take control of the table,* thought Yoshiaki. And just then...

"That's about it," concluded Ookubo. "What should I do about the score?"

"Let's count that last one, so give the Mogami Chancellor one point," said the Reine des Garous. "Even if I had failed to learn the rules, asking for a 'redo' in an international duel would be shameful."

"Ho ho? So you still intend to do this?" asked Yoshiaki.

"Of course. Let me be clear: I will not hold back."

Yoshiaki already knew that, so she spoke up after making sure the Musashi Representative Council Head had moved away from her.

"Now, can you show me what you can do when not holding back?"

It was Yoshiaki's serve, so she retained the advantage.

Mitotsudaira listened to Masazumi who turned back toward her.

"Hey, Mitotsudaira. The Reine des Garous had the rules wrong, so they're

continuing now that she's learned them."

"Wh-what is my mother doing!?"

"Judge. According to Ookubo, she fixed her grip."

"On the balls! She fixed her grip on the balls!"

While the idiot shouted that, Asama opened a sign frame, perhaps to set up an additional purification.

But Masazumi's eyebrows rose when she checked the sign frame.

"Oh? I don't really get it, but they've started in a first-to-5 match."

"Is my mother doing something horrific!?"

"No." Masazumi shook her head. "Mogami Yoshiaki already has 2 points."

*...She's so strong!*

Yoshiyasu watched Yoshiaki moving in front of her.

Yoshiaki's tactic was to use cut shots.

She would catch the approaching ball from a somewhat lowered position and send it back.

Befitting of the name, a cut shot gave the racket a chopping motion directed forward and down. Yoshiaki used that motion to cut back the Reine des Garous's balls.

She had likely decided that a direct hit to those balls would lead to mistakes given the incredible speed given to them by the Reine des Garous.

Yoshiaki dueled the Reine des Garous using those defensive cut shots.

It made noise.

It was a solid but sharp sound.

Immediately, the white ball returned to the Reine des Garous's field and bounced.

Yoshiaki's return shots were not simple things. When picking up her

opponent's balls, she would alter their speed and direct them left, right, up, or down before sending them back. That prevented the Reine des Garous from moving forward to hit them.

“————”

The Reine des Garous had to move forward, back, left, or right more and more often.

This was a tough situation for a beginner.

*...For a beginner, it's easier to hit back a ball that has a certain amount of speed to it.*

Ping pong was a sport that limited the space between the players using the length of the table. So when the velocity reached a certain level, the speed of the ball's back-and-forth movement and the speed of the arm hitting it back would synchronize.

Once that allowed your body to establish a set rhythm, your hesitation when hitting the ball would fade away.

A beginner only had to focus on getting their racket into that rhythm, so it was very helpful.

However, Yoshiaki would not allow that.

If the Reine des Garous used her strength to give the ball lots of speed, she would step back a bit and make a cut with some space in between.

They were using a lightweight ball, so that space caused some slight speed loss.

Yoshiaki used that to return the ball with altered timing.

*...It's incredible.*

Even if it was meant to force the Reine des Garous to move around, Yoshiaki was moving around a lot too.

There could not be much difference in how much they were each moving.

The fox continued moving and constantly swayed her body side to side.

*But, thought Yoshiyasu. The wolf is abnormal too.*



Ookubo had been watching the Reine des Garous for a while now.

Based on her close-up observations, the woman had yet to get in an effective shot.

But her movements were changing while Ookubo watched.

*...How good are her senses?*

The Reine des Garous was definitely learning how to return Yoshiaki's balls.

At first, she had always tried to move forward to finish things quickly with a smash.

But Yoshiaki rejected that idea with her actions.

She focused on cut shots that forced the Reine des Garous into a rally.

The Reine des Garous was still unfamiliar with how to use the racket, so she was moved around by the returned balls.

“—————”

Ookubo held the scoring blackboard. Yoshiaki's second point had come from the Reine des Garous messing up a return. From what Ookubo had seen, the ball had gone up, she had tried to return it with an overhand swing, and she had given it some unwanted spin.

The reverse-spinning ball had lost all its speed and fallen onto her own side of the table.

The Reine des Garous had stuck out her tongue a bit, and...

“Oh, dear. That didn't work at all. In that case...”

After that, she had started what she was doing now.

*...What is happening?*

The Reine des Garous would catch the ball and return it, but the way she returned it was odd.

From what Ookubo could see, she was being moved all over the place by Yoshiaki's control of the ball.

But she was returning the ball. And the ball was always light and floating when she did so.

She was not making cut shots.

Cut shots used a diagonal hit to apply a reverse spin to eliminate speed. The Reine des Garous was instead sending the surface of her racket straight into the ball's trajectory.

Her shots used the center of the forehand side to push the ball more than hit it.

But that still returned it.

Also...

"Ah..."

Ookubo realized there was a pattern to the Reine des Garous's return method.

Kani noticed something odd while watching from diagonally behind the Reine des Garous.

*...2-2-3? No, that was 2-3-3!*

There was a pattern to the way the wolf swayed her body.

When receiving Yoshiaki's shots, she would do 2 forehand shots on the right, 3 backhand shots on the left, and then 3 forehand shots on the right.

And for the next iteration, she would do 2 backhand shots on the left, 3 forehand shots on the right, and then 3 backhand shots on the left.

No matter what kind of balls came her way, she would forcibly return them with those motions.

*...I know what this is!*

Kani was a Strike Forcer, so she understood. This was training.

When learning a martial art, you would learn the fundamentals and then begin applying them.

One example of that was attack stance training. You trained to ensure you could attack from unfamiliar footing or in a disadvantageous stance.

That was what the Reine des Garous was doing now.

She had lost her second point because of a missed shot made with a large movement.

At that point, she had realized moving based on what “felt right” would not cut it in this battle.

So she had changed her movements. Instead of using a forehand or backhand shot depending on the situation, she had forced herself to keep up a rotation between left and right.

And she always hit the ball with the center of the racket to learn how it felt.

That queen had accepted her inexperience and she was now training herself in mid-battle.

But during the interminable rally, her movements were clearly growing more certain.

And the sound of the cut shots grew louder as if in response.

Yoshiaki had raised the speed of her return shots.

Just then, the Reine des Garous altered her stance. She stretched her back and turned her left side forward.

“———!”

She hit a high-speed shot.

Yoshiaki realized her mistake.

The children around them probably had not noticed, but the Reine des Garous was clearly applying pressure on her.

*...Are you taking a step?*

Yoshiaki had noticed the forehand and backhand rotation. She understood it was a way of learning the relationship between the racket and the shots and to

familiarize her body with the motions.

This was the kind of opponent who would take it that far.

But she started to detect a light reverberation when the other woman returned the ball.

It was the reverberation of a foot hitting the floor.

When they moved with only the table between them, they could just barely feel the impact of their opponent's feet on the floor.

The Reine des Garous was gradually starting to take a step when she returned the ball.

It made no noise. They were barefoot after taking a bath. But the tremor definitely reached Yoshiaki.

And you would take a strong step when hitting the ball if you wanted power.

*...Her motions are something like a cut right now, but she's returning to the stance for a quick attack!*

The Reine des Garous's center of gravity was gradually shifting forward. She had to have reached the point that she could move freely if she ended the forehand-backhand rotation.

"I would expect no less...!"

Was this tremor of a step a form of training?

Or was it a warning that she was about to go in for the kill?

Yoshiaki decided to hit a tempting ball to find out.

So she took action. She made a cut shot that sent the ball straight down the center of the Reine des Garou's side.

"...!"

The other woman used the opposite motion of a cut: she swung the racket forward and up from the bottom right.

The force of the strike was a topspin drive. The shot was an attempt to move

forward and it had far more speed than the previous cuts.

*...How about this!?*

Just as she thought that, Yoshiaki realized the white line had already passed her by on the left.

“...!?”

By the time she wondered what had happened, sucked in a breath, and tensed her body, it was too late.

She only knew that the Reine des Garous was taking a deep breath in front of her. And...

*“Testament. I more or less get it now.”*

The woman puffed her chest out and smiled while toying with her racket by spinning it in her fingers.

She had returned it. And at a speed too fast to see.

Yoshiyasu did not understand what had happened until the ball bounced off the counter and rolled back toward her feet.

*...She returned it?*

All she had seen was the shot Yoshiaki made after a short-step duck.

She had also seen the Reine des Garous start to counterattack with something like a right hook.

It was true she had failed to see the swing of the Reine des Garous’s arm. But...

“1 point for the Reine des Garous.”

Ookubo’s words revealed the truth.

Yoshiyasu saw some smoke rising from the table diagonally left from Yoshiaki.

White smoke was also rising from the ball rolling at her feet.

It was unclear if that was from Yoshiaki’s topspin or the Reine des Garous’s return.

*But, thought Yoshiyasu. That monster has rapidly improved in a very short period of time.*

And the Reine des Garous caught the spare ball Ookubo tossed to her and spoke.

“That’s 1 point for me. ...If you continue to simply observe or feel this out, I will catch up.”

Yoshiyasu heard the Reine des Garous casually say “now, then”.

And she tossed the ball up.

“———”

She made a normal serve. It was a cute serve with a gentle hit that made it clear she was a beginner.

*...That makes sense.*

After all, the Reine des Garous had not had a chance to practice serving.

She had been given plenty of opportunities to train her returns and attacks against Yoshiaki earlier.

On the other hand, this was only her second time serving. But Yoshiyasu still found it impressive since she was able to have it bounce on her side and the enemy’s side of the table.

Meanwhile, Yoshiaki moved one foot back in preparation for a cut shot.

“———!”

But it was not a cut shot. She made a full-strength strike against the serve. She hit the ball up from below for a topspin attack.

*...That’s the same as the previous attack!*

She had to be searching out how the Reine des Garous had returned it last time.

But the Reine des Garous made a definite move.

It was different from the previous one. She tilted her body toward the white

line flying toward her.

*...Can she move freely now!?*

She twisted her hips as she stepped forward.

It was a no-spin knuckle shot hit with the center of the racket.

Yoshiaki's spin must have been effective. It hung there for a moment, but...

“—————”

The shot arrived before Yoshiaki could move her arm back.

It was fast.

But Yoshiyasu saw Yoshiaki put up a definite resistance.

She bent just her upper body back to buy time for moving her wrist.

But it was not quite enough for a cut shot, so she added a further motion.

“...Kh!”

By lowering her knees, she simulated lowering her arm.

*...Well done!*

It was the same as angling your body to increase and control your reach and trajectory when stepping in for an attack.

And a solid sound ultimately did ring out.

The heavily spinning ball took a low, spilling trajectory toward the Reine des Garous's left side.

The low trajectory made it hard to intercept. Instead of moving forward and getting it above your field, it was best to step back and use the greater space to deal with it.

But the Reine des Garous returned it. With a backhand penhold shot.

Since she was still not used to this, the ball was fairly light. And Yoshiaki responded.

“—————”

She returned her stance to normal and hit the trajectory with a quick cut.

That too sent it toward the Reine des Garous's left side.

Forcing the wolf to make backhand shots had to be Yoshiaki's strategy.

*...Because she's using the penhold grip.*

When pinching that pen-like grip between your fingers, it was a little difficult to make backhand hits. That was why Yoshiaki concentrated her fire there.

The Reine des Garous was forced into a defensive battle since her left side was being targeted, so all she could do was fall back to the left to make it easier to deal with. So once she moved to the far right side from Yoshiaki's perspective...

*...Hit it!*

Yoshiaki sent her entire body forward.

She made an attack on the opposite side of the enemy's field: the far left side.

Kani saw Yoshiaki *move* the Reine des Garous.

A moment later, Kani saw something unbelievable.

The Reine des Garous vanished in an instant and reappeared just as instantly.

And from Kani's perspective, she had moved from the left to the right side of the field.

*...What was that!?*

She could guess it was an explosion of instantaneous strength, but the Reine des Garous was so tall and...

*...Umm, her boobs! She has huge boobs!*

For someone like that, instantaneous acceleration was completely ridiculous.

But she had done it. She had launched herself to her usual spot, swung her body forward, and...

*"...There."*

She hit the ball with an almost cheerful voice.



A solid sound rang out.

*Now it's really started*, thought Yoshiyasu.

What happened next would determine whether she could follow what was happening.

But Yoshiaki had moved forward and the Reine des Garous had launched a counterattack from the left.

She hit it to the right of Yoshiaki. That was within the fox's reach.

But she could not move back her forward-swinging body so quickly.

Or so Yoshiyasu thought.

But Yoshiaki's stance was different.

When making the right forehand shot, she had stepped forward with her left leg.

She had used that left leg to swing her right leg up and to the left.

That left roundhouse kick took a path that avoided kicking the table and rapidly spun her entire body.

She had not stopped her body's forward momentum and then pulled it back.

She had instead used that forward momentum to spin to the left. And after making a full rotation...

*...She's ready to swing her right arm again!*

She hit the ball.

It was a forceful attack, but it sent the ball upwards.

As the curve bent back down, it flew toward the right side of the field, where the Reine des Garous no longer was.

And just after it flew there, Yoshiyasu saw something: the Reine des Garous's instantaneous acceleration.

Her hair shook, but there were no footsteps. The wolf moved back to her previous position as if pressing her bouncing breasts back against her body.

But this position required a backhand shot.

A hit from there would have less force behind it.

Meanwhile, Yoshiaki had moved forward. She swept her body a bit to the left and readied her racket for a forehand shot.

She was prepared to use all her strength to send the coming bullet back to the Reine des Garous's left side.

A moment later, Yoshiyasu saw something.

The color white had arrived in front of her eyes.

"...Huh?"

It was the Reine des Garous's attack. And it had rapidly moved right past Yoshiaki.

It reached Yoshiyasu before Yoshiaki could move forward.

Yoshiyasu did not understand what had happened.

The Reine des Garous should have needed a backhand shot.

And yet this attack had the speed of a forehand one.

*...How?*

Yoshiyasu looked forward and saw the Reine des Garous breathing a sigh.

"Phew... That was a close one."

It looked like her arms were crossed below her chest.

No, that was not it.

*...That's...*

Yoshiyasu understood.

The Reine des Garous had placed her left arm alongside the right arm launching the backhand shot.

The right-handed return would have had a poor initial velocity because it was backhanded, so she had pushed it forward with her left hand for more initial

acceleration.

That made it an indirect reverse-arm forehand shot. The slightest distortion from pushing on the arm would have altered the ball's trajectory, but that had not happened.

"Is that because she always hits with the very center?"

That familiar sense would not allow any distortions. But if she could pull this off in such a short time...

*...What in the world is she!?*

Just as Yoshiyasu wondered that, Ookubo made an announcement.

"2 points for the Reine des Garous."

Ookubo rewrote the Reine des Garous's score.

Meanwhile, the ball rolled along the floor after bouncing off the counter-side wall.

And Ookubo heard a deep breath.

Yoshiaki's shoulders rose and fell as she replaced the contents of her lungs.

Ookubo understood why the woman had failed to hit the ball back.

*...She had moved forward, so not even spinning around could move her back again.*

Yoshiaki had chosen the wrong tactic.

She made her opponent use backhand shots to push her to one side of the field.

Then she had hit to the opposite side.

Their mobility was restricted by the size of the standard field. Within those restrictions, hitting to the opposite side was the most effective method.

After all, you were hitting the ball outside of their reach.

Even if your opponent did return the ball, it would normally be a rushed action. In that case, you only had to powerfully return that hastily-fired bullet to

the opposite side yet again.

Yoshiaki had done that twice. And the second one had forced her opponent into a backhand shot.

But it had not worked.

Yoshiaki had the upper hand in technique and experience.

But the Reine des Garous had the upper hand in reaction speed and power. Since she existed outside the category of human, she was not bound by the standard assumptions of sports.

*Now, what will she do?* wondered Ookubo.

Just then, she noticed the Reine des Garous raise her right hand.

“What is it?”

“Can I swap out my racket real quick?”

“Judge.”

Ookubo thought about it for a moment, but she nodded.

The Reine des Garous had chosen her racket before she knew the rules.

*...This means she's about to get serious.*

So Ookubo allowed it. She gestured toward the racket holder an automaton had prepared.

“Just this once. Keep that in mind when you choose.”

“Testament. ...Then I will go with this one.”

The Reine des Garous pulled a racket from the holder.

It had a pen-style grip.

But there was one difference from the previous one. It was something not allowed in official matches.

“Both sides have the same rubber material?”

Both sides were covered with black rubber. But they were uniformly thin.

There had to be just the one layer of material attached. The Reine des Garous

spun it around in her hand and smiled.

“The previous one had bumps on the rubber, which allows for a variety of changes, right? But with my finger control, I can probably manage those changes all on my own.”

*Wait just a second*, thought Ookubo.

“Have you ever given a ball spin?”

“I’ve seen it several times. I just have to do the opposite of what I do when I return them, right?”

Technically speaking, that was correct. But could she really just do that right away? No...

“This racket has the same material on both sides, so it should be much easier.”

“Normally...you have thicker rubber on the back.”

If she was fine with the thinner material, just how aggressive a play style was she planning?

But she simply took the ball Ookubo tossed to her.



“Now, let’s try it out.”

She began her serve.

It was a casual thing. A serve was an important thing in a first-to-5 match, but her actions carried none of that weight.

She lifted the ball high and when it arrived just below her chest...

“————”

She launched a high-speed slice of a cut shot.

Kani thought it was a strange image. She watched the Reine des Garous serve from diagonally behind her. The solid sound of the serve created an image in midair.

The white ball floated there without moving.

...*Huh...!*?

She understood the concept. She understood very well what was happening. The phenomenon was as follows: “The spin from her serve was so strong the ball isn’t flying or falling!?”

The ball hit by the Reine des Garous’s slicing motion floated motionlessly in the air. It was actually spinning rapidly, but it was so intense that its position did not change.

“Is this the gyro effect?” asked the Representative Committee Head.

“Is that what you call it...!?”

While the Reine des Garous watched with a frown, the white bullet slowly descended.

It was going to land on the Reine des Garous’s field.

“Um, if this bounces to the other side, it counts as a serve, right?” she asked.

“Well, I guess it’ll have to...”

The Representative Committee Head sounded oddly negligent in her response, so was this really okay?

Meanwhile, the white bullet continued its descent and fell into onto the Reine des Garous's field.

"Ah."

The ball tore into the wooden table.

A loud sound rang out for an instant and small splinters of the table flew into the air. And everyone watched as the white ball embedded itself halfway into the table.

"Wow! It stopped!"

Kani shouted without thinking and the Representative Committee Head raised her voice.

"3 points for the Mogami Chancellor! And can we get a new table in here!?"

For some reason, the automatons hung their heads as they left the counter and set up the new table.

"Mitotsudaira. Your mother has sent a divine transmission via Ookubo."

"Huh? What did she say now?"

"Well." Masazumi showed her the sign frame and read it in a deadpan voice. "**'Nate, I initially had rubber covered in bumps on the end of the stick.'**"

**Mar-Ga:** "Like this?"

The Weiss Hexen made a sketch, but Mitotsudaira ignored her.

Masazumi took a breath and continued.

"**'But, Nate, I swapped it out for a thinner one that glistens black.'**"

**Mar-Ga:** "That would be like this."

The Weiss Hexen made a sketch, but Mitotsudaira ignored her.

"**'Nate? I'm going to do my best using both the front and back, okay?'**"

"Seriously, though! What is my mother doing!?"



Yoshiyasu saw the battle moving back and forth.

The Reine des Garous had fully shifted to using quick attacks while Yoshiaki focused on using cut shots.

The wolf attacked and the fox defended.

But the Reine des Garous made a mistake.

When making a counterattack on one of Yoshiaki's hits, the trajectory collapsed.

"...!?"

Yoshiaki had disguised a knuckle shot as a cut shot.

She had used the trajectory of a cut shot, but she had moved her arm and entire body forward in the instant she hit the ball.

It was only an instant.

The speed at which she pushed the racket forward had to surpass its downward-swinging speed only when the hit made contact.

The technique was only possible with the speed and flexibility of a fox.

The Reine des Garous had been too slow to notice, so the ball she hit fell down without hitting her opponent's field.

"4 points for the Mogami Chancellor."

"My, my... I fell for your feint, didn't I?"

"...I assume you're saying you won't fall for it again."

Yoshiaki laughed in her throat and that was exactly what happened.

The Reine des Garous began primarily using drive shots.

If Yoshiaki's shot type was hard to read, she only had to use her great strength to apply a drive spin to reset it.

The forceful push and high-speed drive created a bouncing ball.

"There."

The shot hit on the front edge of Yoshiaki's field and bounced up toward her

chest.

Yoshiaki responded with a backhand swing, but...

“And there.”

She failed to respond in time when the next shot targeted her left side.

She pulled her racket back and the white line hit it and produced a solid sound. The bullet bounced straight up.

“3 points for the Reine des Garous.”

The wolf had taken another step closer.

The Reine des Garous’s serve began another high-speed rally.

Ookubo had a thought as she watched from close up.

*...Am I seeing something incredibly valuable here?*

*Or am I just seeing a ridiculous game of nonhuman ping pong?*

The two were difficult to tell apart.

And just as she wondered how to report on this, the result suddenly arrived. The Reine des Garous entirely missed the ball.

Ookubo saw the Reine des Garous stop moving.

The white line passed her by on the right and flew behind her. And...

“...Ah.”

The woman said that and Ookubo started to raise her left hand.

This meant the Mogami Chancellor had 5 points.

It was a first-to-5 match, so it was over.

*...The end happened awfully quickly.*

Ookubo sensed some disappointment in that thought while she opened her mouth.

“The Mogami Chancellor-...”

She started to say the woman had won the match.

But someone stopped her.

“Sorry. But that counts as the Reine des Garous’s point.”

Yoshiaki was the one speaking. And she was breathing heavily.

“Yoshiyasu. Can you come here a moment?”

Yoshiyasu nodded at Yoshiaki’s words.

“Judge. I more or less understand.”

“Understand what?” asked Ookubo.

Yoshiyasu raised her right hand with the palm out.

The gesture meant “wait”. And when she arrived next to Yoshiaki...

*...She sure is exhausted...*

This was the first time she had seen Yoshiaki so out of breath her shoulders were rising and falling. It was also her first time seeing the fox’s hair so disheveled. It had been hard to tell while looking at her from behind.

“...She’s really done a number on you, Yoshiaki.”

“I cannot deny it.”

Yoshiaki could still laugh in her throat. That “ko ko” felt calming to Yoshiyasu, so she held out her hand.

“I will look after them.”

“Testament. Then let’s start with this.”

With that line, Yoshiaki pulled something from her sides.

They were fans. The two fans doubled as guns and they were also used to control the Yamagata Castle.

That was not all.

“This too, Yoshiyasu.”

She then pulled a long object from her side. It was...

“The proof of my control of Mogami: Onikiri.”

Yoshiaki took a breath and passed Onikiri to Yoshiyasu.

Then she turned toward the Reine des Garous and nodded.

“Sorry about that. ...I was carrying so much stuff that, when I moved, a trickery phase space rose to the surface. Since I scored that point using it, I must give you a point back for the initial Silver Cross point.”

“Heh heh. Then my initial mistake was useful after all. But...I was curious to see the extent of my relationships based on what happened if you cut me with Onikiri.”

The Reine des Garous smiled bitterly, looked to Yoshiaki’s tails, and said more.

“You are a very honest person, aren’t you?”

“Everyone who falls for a fox’s tricks thinks the same thing.”

“But it’s the truth. ...It’s 4-4. An even score between two honest people.”

“Is that so?” asked Yoshiaki with a bitter smile.

*...This wolf must be honest with anyone she takes a liking to.*

Yoshiaki nodded at her own thought and placed a hand on her chest.

“Listen. ...Tricks are the natural response to anyone who would harm Mogami. But this is not the time for that, is it?”

She turned to face Yoshiyasu and gestured her chin toward the fans and Onikiri the girl held.

“You understand what it means for me to leave those with you, even if just for a moment?”

“Judge. I am to watch to the end with these. And you...” Yoshiyasu raised her eyebrows. “You’ve lightened your load.”

Yoshiaki spent a few seconds thinking about what that meant, and...

“Acting like an adult now, are we?”

She laughed.

*...Honestly.*

Laugh was all she could do.

*...Children are so quick to act like adults.*

And at some point the act would be indistinguishable from the real thing.

A parent watched their child's growth one stage at a time. But they would eventually reach a much higher position.

She only had to look up at the shape and peak of the mountain this child and the other children were climbing.

"Good, good."

She rubbed Yoshiyasu's head and the girl's eyebrows bent. But Yoshiaki realized she was putting on a strong front to show that she was a parent.

It was true she had lightened her load. So she took a light step forward and assumed her playing stance again.

Both sides had 4 points.

"It is your serve," she said.

"Testament. You seem to have regained your spirit."

"Testament. I confirmed I will have no regrets. And foxes are known for our nimbleness." Yoshiaki narrowed her eyes. "It's time you learned not even a wolf stands a chance if they underestimate the threat."

It was the Reine des Garous's serve.

This was the final stage of the first-to-5 match. They faced each other with a solid foundation of 4 points each.

"Now."

The Reine des Garous tossed the white line upwards while still facing straight ahead.

And as it fell...

“Let’s get going!”

The racket hopped up from below and launched the white force.

The match had begun.

A solid sound summoned the wind.

White lines similar to gunfire passed back and forth between the two attackers.

The Reine des Garous moved forward every single time and Yoshiaki stayed back while occasionally moving forward.

The wolf was powerful. More and more of her white slashes flew in to crush the fox’s resistance.

Each time, the fox twisted her body, pulled it back, and...

“—————!”

She spun around to adjust her position. And when there was even the slightest opening...

“Ko...!”

With a short roar, she would snap at the wolf’s side.

The solid sounds arrived afterwards as both worked to establish their tactics. But...

“Like this, right?”

The wolf moved against the white attack attempting to stab at her side.

She whipped up the wind and spun just like the fox had.

This was not a careless action. Her footsteps rang out for the first time.

But with the loud sounds of her feet, her attack’s rotation speed grew.

The wolf was gaining more definite methods of attack and she was starting to overwhelm the fox.

“Kh...!”

The wolf combined her instantaneous acceleration with her rotation. The fox's scattered attacks tried to lure her in, but she began to return them all with her own counterattacks.

More and more wind raced forth and the fox was driven to the center of her field.

She was forced to fall back, as if being hunted by a pack, but...

"Here."

The wolf suddenly smiled and all strength vanished from the bullet she launched.

It was a sudden deceleration.

This was more than just a brief slowdown. The shot nearly stopped.

The impact sounded like a normal ping pong hit and the white line took the form of a ball traveling at a leisurely pace.

It was like tossing bait to the fox who had moved so far back from the field.

"Yoshiaki! Don't fall for it!"

The dog shouted a warning, but the fox still moved forward.

If the fox did not take the bait tossed in front of the wolf pack, she would lose.

So she stepped forward and gathered all her strength.

"————!"

She made a slicing attack.

*This is dangerous*, thought Yoshiyasu.

It was the wolf's trap. While pursuing as a pack, the wolf had thrown out some bait to keep the fox from getting too close.

She intended to attack once the fox took the bait.

Of course, the fox was not helpless. She was sure to launch an attack on the

wolf just as she took the bait.

But this was the wolf's trap. Everything that happened there would be part of the wolf's plan.

Yoshiyasu could tell the wolf had everything ready.

She took a low stance in preparation to finish off the fox here.

A moment later, the fox took the bait.

A solid sound rang out and the wolf made her initial movement.

But Yoshiyasu saw something there.

*...Huh?*

No, she did *not* see something there. Something that should have been between the fox and wolf.

The white line had vanished from the battlefield.

*"...!?"*

It was the fox's trickery.

Ookubo had no idea what had happened.

She saw nothing there.

The white color was no longer where it had been before.

At first she thought Yoshiaki had *taken* the bait more literally than expected. But...

*...No, that isn't it!*

It was the fox's trickery. She had responded to the wolf's trap with a trick.

That was how a fox did things. So...

*...Where did it go!?*

She knew where it had to be headed. And even if she did not see it, someone else had: the Reine des Garous.

*"—————"*



And that woman had disappeared.

Her volume had vanished from its position overlooking the battlefield.

She was gone.

*No, thought Ookubo. That isn't it either.*

The fox had used a trick and the wolf had responded. So she had to be...

“Up above, right!?”

Kani saw the Reine des Garous's decision and movement.

Up at the ceiling, the woman had made a half rotation that put her feet up and her head down.

She was pursuing the white line that had flown high into the air.

That was the attack Yoshiaki had launched.

When she hit the white line up, it had accelerated from the bounce and instantly arrived far above the battlefield.

This vertical movement had come without warning when everyone was focused on the horizontal movement from before.

Anyone following along with their eyes would not have been able to keep up.

That was true for Kani.

But someone had kept up with this trick: the Reine des Garous.

She had seen through the trick before her eyes. And that was not thanks to smell or sound.

*...It was the second point she lost, right!?*

Back then, Yoshiaki had hit the ball high and the Reine des Garous had failed to return it.

If Yoshiaki was going to earn a point here, she would use the same trajectory. And the Reine des Garous had realized the fox would hit it even higher.

Her movement had been close to a gamble, but it had paid off.

She fixed the bottom of her yukata in midair and raised her racket. She used the ceiling as a floor and...

“—————!”

She launched an attack toward the fox on the battlefield below.

A high-speed attack was hit with a powerful drive.

Now that it was hit, the ball did not float up and only flew forward.

But the bullet did not fly toward Yoshiaki.

It flew to her left. It was an accurate shot to force her into a backhand return.

She turned in that direction, but she was not going to make it.

“...Yoshiaki!” Yoshiyasu’s voice rang out. “Win this!”

*That is easier said than done,* thought Yoshiaki with a bitter smile in her heart.

She was heavily exhausted. Her opponent most likely had the upper hand in speed and power.

She could not win in this state.

She had experience and technique, but her opponent had the power and reflexes to respond to that.

Also, her opponent was a beginner and had been learning the ropes, but...

*...With that just now, she must have reached my level.*

That meant the gap between them would only continue to shrink.

Yoshiaki could not win with strength.

But she was a nine-tailed fox, a great monster fox. There was one thing she definitely had over the wolf.

“Ether usage.”

It happened in an instant.

In the blink of an eye, Ookubo saw Yoshiaki multiply in number.

*...Copies!?*

This was not a martial arts technique. They were real copies using ether.

There were 9 of them and nothing to distinguish them from the original. They were all very real.

“Take this...!”

When the white line flew in, one of the slashing motions held the racket.

And a solid sound rang out.

Yoshiaki had returned the Reine des Garous’s attack.

And she had launched it straight toward the wolf as she fell from the ceiling.

Yoshiaki put away her copies and took another breath.

She took a defensive stance and watched for the Reine des Garous’s response with a certain thought in her heart.

*...It all comes down to this!*

The Reine des Garous had not allowed her to reproduce the previous lost point. She had grown during this short battle.

So it was coming.

She would use the attack she had used to earn her first point.

This would undoubtedly be that slash that not even Yoshiaki had been able to see.

“———!”

It came.

The Reine des Garous adjusted her position with her ankles and made a forehand attack.

And Yoshiaki saw the initial leaning back of the upper body that would lead to that invisible shot.

It would be a high-speed slash.

*...She hits it with her racket on its side!?*

The Reine des Garous launched her sword strike.

The object she held was honestly difficult to wield as an offensive weapon.

Because the “surface” was so large, it created air resistance and thus wind pressure when she swung it.

And the rubber on the surface was useful when defending, but it absorbed the force when attacking.

So she held it on its side.

The pen-style racket was shaped more rectangularly than the shake-style ones.

So the panel sticking out from the handle was almost a rectangle.

Its side was a lot like a straight sword.

So she could perform a slash with that.

But she was a beginner and it was difficult to control the wind pressure that hit the blade.

So she held it pen-style and controlled it with her fingers.

With a shake-style grip, your wrist would hold it firmly in place, but the pen-style did not.

A light wrist was necessary for instantaneous acceleration.

She met all the conditions now. So...

“...There!”

The burst of acceleration traveled from her hips to her chest, shoulder, elbow, and wrist in turn.

The Reine des Garous launched a diagonal slash of an attack.

Ookubo had not seen the Reine des Garous's attack.

No, this battle had long since surpassed what a literal arts type could keep up with.

She felt an odd trust in the two battle participants. She was confident that they would both return the bullet.

So she had not been looking at the Reine des Garous. She had been watching Yoshiaki's response.

Yoshiaki was trying to perform a counterattack on the high-speed shot.

But her stance was different. This was not a cut shot like before.

The fox held her racket horizontally.

*...She's going to hit it with the side, isn't she!?*

*I see,* thought Ookubo as she finally figured out the Reine des Garous's invisible slash.

And she knew Yoshiaki intended to make an even greater attack.

After all, the fox made another movement.

She brought her left hand to the right one already holding the racket.

"She's using both hands!!"

Yoshiaki performed a slice from the middle right.

When swinging the racket so quickly, the blade tended to catch the wind and veer off course.

The wolf could probably suppress that with her strength, but Yoshiaki was a fox. So she placed both hands on it, and...

"Ko...!"

With a laugh-like cry, she swung her blade.

But she included one trick. Instead of just hitting it back, she used a drive.

The shake-style racket had a nearly circular blade.

She used that arc for a long drive.

The method was simple. Any warrior from the Far East could do it.

She only had to do it like it was a sword.

Far Eastern swords were not used to cut the enemy as you hit them. You hit the enemy with the blade and then pulled back to slice them.

That was the purpose of their curved shape and the item she now held was similarly shaped.

The rest was the same.

The curve may have been short, but she used it to its fullest for her slash. She slowly reversed both her wrists. It was not an instantaneous thing, but the solid cutting edge reached the white line.

*...Go...!*

And it was released.

Yoshiaki bet on this move while keeping her arms in the follow-through motion.

This was the first time in the match she had launched the bullet with a drive like that.

It was a side drive from the side of the racket.

It was not a topspin from above or reverse spin from below like before.

The bullet she launched onto the battlefield was a drive that raced to the right.

It was targeted at the Reine des Garous's left side at the very back.

That was exactly where it went.

The sound of a real impact shook the battlefield.

Immediately, the bouncing bullet flew with nearly vertical cornering.

But the wolf took action. Not with a side step and not with a spin.

She had turned herself in the opposite direction after her previous forehand hit.

And she hit from behind her back on her right.

It was a complete backhand attack, but her wrist was in place.

She twisted her hips slightly and unleashed her monstrous acceleration.

It traveled through her back, shoulder, elbow, wrist, and...

*...Is she using her fingers too!?*

That movement was only possible with the penhold grip. And once it was all complete...

“———!”

The sleeve of Reine des Garous’s yukata tore from the force of the instantaneous acceleration.

The whipped-up wind scattered the cloth and increased the speed of her arm. Yoshiaki prepared herself to respond, but...

*...Will I make it in time!?*

Just then, she heard a bursting sound.

The Reine des Garous had swung her blade with a burst of acceleration behind her back and it had torn into the white line.

Ookubo saw the end of the match.

It exploded before her eyes.

When the Reine des Garous’s strike tore into the white line...

“Ah...”

It burst.

It failed to endure the repeated high-speed slashes and scattered like a flower.

“Oh, dear.” The Reine des Garous smiled while the shredded pieces of her

clothing scattered around her. “I’m still not used to this. ...I forgot to hold back and lost myself in the moment, just like old times.”

Ookubo breathed in as she heard those words and saw the scattered white.

“According to the rules, if the round cannot continue, then whoever caused that loses a point.”

Thus...

“5 points for the Mogami Chancellor. ...And those 5 points mean the Mogami Chancellor is the winner!!”

Yoshiaki could not move as she listened to Ookubo.

She maintained her stance and focused on the emptiness before her eyes.

*...It's over?*

She knew why this had happened.

But her body and mind were still in combat mode and trying to follow the white line she could no longer see.

Her body was also threatening to move on reflex. So...

“Hey.”

A voice from the side brought her back to her senses.

Three things entered her field of vision: two large fans and Onikiri.

When Yoshiyasu held them out to her, she was finally able to turn her gaze in that direction.

“Hand over what you’re holding there. I’ll play a normal match against Ookubo as a palate cleanser. You take these things. Because...yeah,” said Yoshiyasu. “That’s what a fox should be holding.”

“...Acting like an adult now, are we?”

Yoshiaki straightened up while feeling her sweat pour out.

Her feet supported her body which was unsteady more from sudden relaxation than exhaustion.



And she looked to the Reine des Garous.

That woman had sweat on her brow and she stuck her tongue out a little when their eyes met.

The Loup-Garou queen slowly approached a few steps and pinched the bottom of her yukata.

“I’m so sweaty it’s growing see-through. I really wish I could show my husband.” She held out her right hand. “Until we meet again. ...I will remember the proper etiquette next time.”

“Yes, I am one of the few who can take you on.”

Yoshiaki smiled bitterly and shook that hand. And when she did...

*...Oh.*

Something warm yet cool flowed from that palm.

The Reine des Garous may have been using the unique Loup-Garou synchronization ability to transfer stamina. In that case...

*...I can't believe this.*

*Now there is a fellowship between us,* thought Yoshiaki with a bitter smile.

So she said, “You should visit Ushuu next time. ...The fox will show the wolf around.”

“Hey, Mitotsudaira. Did you see the duel is over?”

Mitotsudaira nodded at Masazumi’s question. She took a sip of tea to hydrate herself while taking a break.

“Judge. It seems my mother lost. I’m not entirely sure what happened, but that’s the Mogami Chancellor for you.”

“Yes, and the Reine des Garous sent another message.” Masazumi looked at the sign frame the anteater opened and read it in a deadpan voice. “**‘Nate? I learned a lot here. When you put thick rubber on the end of the stick, the stimulation is a little weak, but the balls last much longer. Use thin rubber and they don’t last very long at all. Use the hard part and you’ll have an explosion**

**on your hands... Well, I did my best, but we couldn't get past three times. Remember all this, okay?' "**

"What in the world was my mother doing!?"

Horizon brought over a bamboo pole with a straight face, but Mitotsudaira gestured her toward Asama and made a quick retreat.

# Chapter 61: Gluttons After the Fighting

## 第六十一章

### 『終戦後の飽食者達』



このハラヘリは  
何かの期待の裏返し  
ああ何処何処何処  
メシは何処であるか  
配点（ですネー）

*This hunger*

*Is the flipside of expectation*

*Where, oh, where, oh, where*

*Where is there food?*

**Point Allocation (I Know, Right?)**

The color of the sky was changing.

The cloudy sky was a light yellow. The color grew darker as the wind blew in from the ocean.

That change was widely visible from open areas.

Odawara Castle was one such location.

The castle was built for the plains, but it now appeared to be floating on the water. The moats all around it were filled with water, some parts were flooded from the gates, and sandbags held back the water.

But the inner citadel was positioned higher than the rest, so there was no sign of water and you could simply view the wind and sky from there.

Inside the encampment set up there, Ujinao stood in an open area alongside a simple water source and open-air kitchen.

Automatons waited by the edge of the cream-colored cloth partitions.

But another automaton stood in front of her.

“Hey, Ujinao.”

It was Ujiteru. Ujinao responded by stabbing her right sword into his chest.

It was a sudden thing.

The instant the blade entered his chest, Ujiteru fell back and used his left arm.

There was a metallic clang, but Ujinao did not back away. Left, right, and...

“Uncle.”

Up, down, and right again. She made several simultaneous slashes. And...

“Over here.”

She made three central jabs at different heights.

In the end, a single sword was stabbed into the center of Ujiteru’s chest.  
Also...

“Oh.”

His left arm fell away at the elbow.

As it fell, his maid uniform burst in several places.

This was all the result of the slashes Ujinao had made in an instant.

But Ujiteru did not collapse. He used his right arm to remove the blade  
stabbed into his chest.

“Is this what you call a difference in specs? Well?”

“Uncle, you have continued to improve yourself with your own company,  
haven’t you?” said Ujinao. “This is a difference in resolve. ...Why are you here?  
We are trying to fight duels at the moment.”

“You ask that nowwwwwww!?”

“Testament. ...Of course. This is the natural course of our interactions.”

“Honestly... Is that any way to repay the person who looked after you when  
you were little and then killed yooooouuuuu!?”

“Testament. And I repaid you by killing you,” said Ujinao. “This will be the last  
time. ...Let us fight to end our familial relationship.”

“Fight? I hope you mean to the death. Your death!”

“Uncle, you are much too weak to follow through on such a threat.”

“Damn yoooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!”

A short sword was stabbed up to the hilt in his chest.

At some point, Ujinao had moved right up to him. And...

“Did you say something?”

Ujiteru responded with a blow from his right hand.

It was an unarmed strike. The chopping action was sent straight toward her from the side at tremendous speed.

However, she was no longer there.

“Now...” She stabbed a full-length sword up to the hilt in his right side. “Did you think you had regained your knack for battle after dueling Sviet Rus’s Honjou? Uncle, you too were originally a demon. And while it is only on paper, you and Uesugi Kagetora, aka Marfa, are siblings. Honjou has a mixture of demon and human blood, but did that duel remind you of old times?”

“Wait, wait. You sure are taking a lyrical view of meeeee!”

“Then,” said Ujinao. “Let us discuss utility, uncle. Based on the tactile feedback of stabbing you just now, your body has been modified for high-speed reactions and agility. That was well done. Now that you have been damaged, your strengthened power system will fail to maintain its balance and your entire body will contract, preventing you from moving.”

“Wanna know why I did thaaaaaaaat? Well, do yooooooooooooooooooooo!”

“Please tell me.”

“To kill yooooooooooooooooooooo!”

“Just as it seemed, then.”

Ujinao took a step back and lowered both her arms.

“Uncle. ...I challenge you to a battle.”

“So you wanna fiiiiiiiiiiiiight!?”

“Testament. Do you know the purpose of this battle?”

“You had thaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaat wrong before!!”

“Testament, I did indeed. Before, I thought the purpose of our battle was to figure out what it meant to win.”

But...

“That is incorrect. I now understand the meaning behind your powerful

delusions.”

“Then tell meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!”

“Testament,” replied Ujinao. “As we face destruction, the purpose of our battles...is to figure out what it means to lose and how to lose.”

With that, Ujinao took a certain action.

She opened her closed eyes.

Ujiteru saw his niece’s eyes. He saw a dim light in those eyes.

They were colored gold. And the residual image of that light drew a long trail.

“These are the prosthetic eyes my father created from his remaining life when he was cut down: Advance Samsara.”

“Ujimasa just had to leave some trouble behind, didn’t heeeeeeeeeee!?”

“Testament. These eyes do not take in light. They ‘draw in’ light in the form of ether.”

Meaning...

“Ether is the ley lines. The more I draw those in, the more my eyes can see in advance. That precognition has a very limited range, but when combined with the high-speed thoughts of an automaton, they become the ultimate vision that allows me to respond to any situation.”

Ujinao looked up at her uncle with the light in her eyes.

“Now, I went easy on you last time. I closed my eyes partway through and allowed you to use your full strength. But that is not what I should have done.”

“Then what’ll you do this tiiiiiiiime!? Tell meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!”

“I will use my full strength to the very end, use all means available to me, and never give up on fighting you. ...A satisfying loss is found after using your full strength, but another kind of satisfaction is found when your opponent used their full strength as well.”

So...



“We must be the residents of ruin who desire that kind of loss. And as our final leader, I will show you the utmost respect as someone leaving before me.”

“Oh...?” The corners of Ujiteru’s mouth rose. “Your father couldn’t do that.”

“I doubt I could have done it had I remained how I was at birth.” There was a slight smile on Ujinao’s lips. “Father and daughter. After two generations, allow me to finally give you what you want, uncle.”

With that, she stabbed a sword into Ujiteru’s hip.

And she spoke while standing right in front of him.

“I have already begun.”

“I guess you could say it’s started.”

Masazumi commented on the results written on her sign frame.

It was nearly 5 PM, so the duels would be ending before long.

But the real challenge for the various nations was still to come. They would have to view their achievements and losses and plan their next actions.

Musashi too would be making their next move while keeping a general framework in mind, but...

“Hey, Aoi. I expect we’ll be negotiating with Sviet Rus soon, but do you have anything to say or to drive home as a policy for me to follow?”

The group buying things at the festival stands parted and a crossdresser turned around.

“Is Kagekatsu gonna help Flatty get her land back from the landsharks?”

“Call it the Kantou Liberation. ...From what I’ve seen, I’m guessing Honjou will join the fight. Sviet Rus borders P.A. Oda, so if they send too large a force to the Kantou Liberation, they could have their own territory taken.”

“Hm, and Date has Uki’s wife fighting, so is everyone pretty much the same?”

“To be honest, Mogami is a special case since they’ve announced their intention to take our side. Their rights from the duels will be left with us.”

“Gotta love that fox lady. ...I guess we’ll have to do something for Mogami then.”

*Yes, we will,* thought Masazumi. But...

“We also have to consider the balance of power between Mogami, Date, and Sviet Rus.”

“How so?”

“Mogami is going to decline in the future. Because of that, we intend to leave them there as a Matsudaira-supported manager of Ushuu. But since we’ve already given them a pretty good deal with the trade route, the other two nations might try to interfere if we give Mogami any other advantages.”

“Oh.” Balfette raised her hand. “Looking at this dryly, isn’t it only natural to give them more advantages when Date and Sviet Rus haven’t announced where they stand on this?”

Everyone nodded in agreement.

**Mar-Ga:** “You would take their side after all the snacks you devoured in Mogami...”

**Uqui:** “So they won her over with the power of rice snacks...”

**Azuma:** “Their rice crackers are really good. I had some imported ones when I was in Kyou.”

**Flat Vassal:** “Huh, huh? Why are you all treating me like a reverse spy?”

**Wise Sister:** “Okay, Adele, time to argue your case! Let’s start with Argument #1! Oh, but you’re probably more acquainted with #2! And those rice snacks must have helped that go more smoothly! Here, send Argument #2 out through this heart shape I’m making with my hands! Gooooooooal!!”

**Flat Vassal:** “I have no idea what you’re even talking about anymore!”

“Umm.” Balfette tilted her head. “To follow up on what I said, Mogami knows its decline is coming, so in a way, they can act without fear. But the history recreation gives Hashiba room to intervene with Date and Sviet Rus, so they can’t openly do anything.”

“Judge. That’s right. It would be unfair if we didn’t take their individual circumstances into account.”

“Then what do we do?”

“There is a way,” said Masazumi. “Mogami stepped forward and fought as part of Musashi, so we can have Date and Sviet Rus work to Musashi’s benefit in negotiation. ...Instead of only helping Mogami, we will base it on Mogami’s results and allow the other nations to pass their results to us as well. We keep things balanced like that while negotiating.”

“Masazumi, are you sure about that?” asked Mitotsudaira. “Even if we treat them to a lavish feast of rewards, we will eventually hit a limit and be unable to provide any more rewards and we will decline.”

“That’s right,” agreed Neshinbara while typing up the details of the Siege of Odawara duels. “That was how the Kamakura shogunate’s decline happened. The shogunate reached the limit of rewards they could provide and the warriors earned less and less for their work at around the time of the Mongol invasions. Any ideas there, Crossdressing Honda-kun?”

“It’s simple. If we do nothing, we will receive complaints. And immediate ones at that. If there is a way to delay the end of peace, it is a politician’s duty to search for it. The answer has already been hinted at, so I will use that here. ... Let’s just say that direct wealth is not the only kind of reward.”

“Oh, so you have an idea. ...Then you handle that, Seijun.” The crossdresser clapped his hands once. “The fox lady did a good job. So did Flatty. ...So make sure to treat them well. Oh, Kagekatsu and the Date group too. Since they wanted to act but couldn’t.”

“You ask for a lot.”

Masazumi sighed and Mitotsudaira smiled.

“You sound happy, Masazumi.”

“I know I have the makings of a workaholic.” Masazumi nodded. “Yeah, it must be genetic. My father will often work for three days straight.”

“Okay! Dragoon-emon is really getting going now, Koni-tan! I say we hold the Provisional Council Meeting at this karaoke place toniiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiight!”

“Nobu-tan! Why are you requesting so many songs in a row!? ...Ah! You’re already at 37 hours’ worth, and they’re all different Video Gagaku songs!!”

“ ‘Raaaaaise aaaa baaaaattle cryyyy! Turn around and you’re all alone!’ ”

“Ahh, that’s Lonely Nagashino Falls for a Purposeful Trap! That’s *my* specialty!”

Masazumi received a divine mail from her father saying he had just started a long meeting.

*...These back-to-back battles can’t be easy for them either.*

“Anyway, Aoi, it’s good for Musashi that you’re asking for so much. So leave it to me. ...Also, it’s about time everyone got ready to leave. Once the negotiations are dealt with, we’ll try to get in on the Siege of Kanie Castle.”

“Crossdressing Honda-kun. What are you saying?”

“You can’t tell?” She took a bite of an apple before continuing. “We’re about to take one of Houjou’s rights that neither we nor Mogami have.”

*...Oh, no!*

Honjou Shigenaga stood in front of a café.

She had heard the café served sake, soba, and snacks, so...

“I was hoping to eat some local Odawara specialties before leaving, but...”

A sign frame saying “Closed for the Day” was displayed in front along with a bolt-shaped locking spell.

The door was shut and there were no lights on inside.

It was completely closed.

*...That sure is unfortunate.*

Walking back to the Sviet Rus camp felt like way too much work.

Looking back, her mistake had been falling for the temptation of filling her stomach before heading back.

That said, she did have to return to camp. The sky was being dyed in evening colors and the battlefield was waiting for the next act.

“Musashi needs to negotiate with Houjou and join the Siege of Kanie Castle.”

*But, she thought while turning around. What will Musashi give to Houjou?*

Mouri and Sviet Rus had won Houjou rights.

Mouri would not give up theirs.

For the western nation of Mouri, establishing a connection with an eastern nation would be the greatest success. Even if Houjou was doomed, this result gave Mouri the right to lay claim to the land once that happened.

And when they left to develop the outside world, they would pass through India if they used the southern route across the continent. Musashi and Houjou would likely be in charge of India’s development, so being able to claim a right there meant a lot.

Meanwhile, Sviet Rus also had a good reason to lay claim to the land of a southern nation like Houjou. A permanent position in southern land would benefit them greatly.

*...But the Chancellor wants to give that to Musashi.*

That was because the trade route to Edo already gave them a path to southern land.

Control of that trade route would rotate between the three nations, but it would also come with support from Matsudaira.

Even if they were ceded some Houjou land, it would not connect to the trade route and they would still be forced to cross Edo or Matsudaira land to reach the trade route.

Which would benefit them more: focusing on the trade route, or gaining some land they had permanent control over?

“The Chancellor has decided to take the trade route.”

In that case, it was a retainer's job to bet on that development.

*...That just leaves one problem.*

Just as Honjou thought that, she noticed a food cart across from the café.

It was for curry. Houjou land was Indian land, so it was the home of curry.  
Thus...

"Manager, can I get a plate?"

"Sure. This will be the last order."

He was from Musashi.

**Shigeko:** "That was a cheap trick!"

**Vice President:** "Oh? Honjou!? Perfect timing! This is a delicate problem, so I'll try to be indirect: Could you give us your Houjou rights!?"

**Shigeko:** "How is that indirect!?"

**83:** "Would directly be 'hand over the rights'?"

**Vice President:** "More or less. I'll be open with you: that is the entirety of what we need right now. So how about it, Sviet Rus?"

**Asa-no-Bu:** "Bad! W-wait, Shigenaga-kun! You mustn't!"

**Shigeko:** "Um, Saitou-san, what do you mean by that?"

**Asa-no-Bu:** "Based on the Testament, Sviet Rus officially belongs to Hashiba until Sekigahara is over. And our nation borders P.A. Oda, so they are in position to interfere if they are given any kind of justification. ...I believe directly negotiating with Musashi and working to Musashi's benefit would be dangerous."

*That is an aspect of this,* thought Masazumi concerning Saitou's words.

It was true Sviet Rus had been fighting P.A. Oda until just the other day.

And the Shibata forces remained in northern P.A. Oda.

Based on the Testament, Shibata could not get involved with Sviet Rus. But if Sviet Rus violated the Testament by openly approaching Musashi, Shibata could be ordered to act by Hashiba, the Testament Union Representative.

In that case...

*...We can't directly negotiate with Sviet Rus.*

"Hey! Seijun! How's it going!? How's it going!? Got everything wrapped up!?"

*Shut up, idiot.*

*...Anyway, we need to put together some kind of strategy here.*

If Sviet Rus could not officially hold a post-battle negotiation with Musashi, that would apply to Date and Mogami as well.

She decided to make sure.

**Vice President:** "Honjou. Could Mogami work toward their own advantage *as an agent of Musashi?*"

**Shigeko:** "Mogami could do that while Sviet Rus could not."

"But," said Honjou.

**Shigeko:** "We of course would have to handle that as a negotiation *with Mogami.*"

*I thought as much,* thought Masazumi.

*...I was kind of hoping we could get Houjou's rights from Sviet Rus via Mogami.*

The conflict between Mogami and Sviet Rus was based on the Punishment of Aizu.

That involved Date and Mogami standing up to Sviet Rus, so it had nothing to do with Houjou's rights.

*...In that case...*

"Judge. Then I would like to review what rights we all have."

Masazumi asked Honjou a question while considering a possibility.

"Is that all right?"

Narumi stopped at the café's back entrance.

*...Oh, it's closed...*

Just like Ujiteru had said. The café was closed and everyone who had been inside had either gone elsewhere or returned to their camp.

"Then maybe I should get back too."

She heard distant sounds of fighting, probably from Odawara Castle.

She wondered who those unilateral noises were coming from.

Of course, it was too late to seek a duel with either fighter. The hour rest period was too long.

"In that case..."

*Time to leave*, she thought just before a sign frame appeared next to her face.

**Shigeko:** "Date Narumi, this is urgent. ...Are you willing to hear me out?"

"Why did you tell me your location?"

Shigenaga heard Narumi's voice directly.

She had just finished about a third of the Musashi curry. She nodded toward Narumi who walked up from the left and she spoke to the curry cart's manager.

"Can you prepare enough for her as well?"

"Sure." He shrugged and began chopping up the remaining ingredients.

"Making more roux now would be difficult, so I will make a dry curry-style grilled vegetable meal."

"I appreciate it," said Narumi while moving next to Shigenaga. Then she asked a question. "What is this about? Negotiations, right? Since you have already withdrawn."

"Testament. There is one thing I want to discuss first." Shigenaga chose her words carefully. "Would it be possible to trade the Houjou rights my nation won for the Sviet Rus rights you won?"



**Katakura-kun:** “Hi! This is the 5 PM reminder call from the ever-cheerful Date Vice President!”

**Unturning:** “I will act on my own discretion. Okay?”

**Katakura-kun:** “Eh? ...Ah, wait, waaaaaiiiit! If you act without taking the leaders’ opinions into account, then those leaders are unnecessary! Are you saying I’m unnecessary!? You are, aren’t you!? More! Say it more! Ahhhn, I heard so many people saying I was unnecessary when I was given this position, but I’m still cheerf-...don’t hang up!”

“We can’t do that, can we?” asked Narumi. “That deal wouldn’t work.”

The Sviet Rus and Date negotiation was invalid. Because...

“If Sviet Rus gave us their Houjou rights and then I defeated you, Sviet Rus’s wins and losses would cancel out to zero. ...The ‘fact’ of my victory over Sviet Rus would remain, but if Sviet Rus’s wins and losses cancel out, it will not qualify as the Punishment of Aizu.”

“Testament. I am aware of that. That is the purpose of this preliminary negotiation.”

Shigenaga nodded while taking an egg from the curry chef.

“We will begin the preparations soon. ...No, you could say we have already begun.”

“Already?”

Shigenaga suddenly looked to the right.

A few figures stood there.

The first that Narumi saw were the parents.

*...The Reine des Garous and Mogami Yoshiaki.*

And in front of them were Ookubo and...

“Satomi Yoshiyasu...?”

“Judge, Date Representative. ...Sorry for interrupting mid-conversation. As a Mogami Representative, I have business with Honjou Shigenaga there.”

“Business?”

What were they going to negotiate in this situation?

*...Since they brought the Reine des Garous as a Mouri Representative, it must be a largescale rights issue.*

The battle must have ended and the nations were beginning their negotiations over rights.

Narumi decided she could intervene in the off chance this began working against Musashi. So...

“Fine. Don’t mind me and get to talking.”

“Judge. Thank you. We will.” Yoshiyasu walked toward Shigenaga. “Shigenaga, let me cut right to the chase: *Mogami has yet to defeat Uesugi* to fulfill our role in the history recreation of the Punishment of Aizu. We have none of their rights and we have not established the ‘fact’ of having defeated them. ...Thus, would it be possible for Uesugi to give us the rights of an Uesugi loss?”

*...Huh? Narumi had a reason for thinking that.*

She was the one with the rights of an Uesugi loss.

So Mogami only had to negotiate with her for them.

She of course understood that they wanted to officially receive them from Uesugi to establish “Uesugi’s loss”, but at the moment, she had not given those rights to Uesugi.

*...That means the Mogami Representative is negotiating with Sviet Rus on the assumption that I will make that deal.*

*Why?* wondered Narumi.

Why did they need to use anything as roundabout as a fictional deal?

She tilted her head and thought. When focused on efficiency, talking to her would be best. But...

“————”

Narumi realized that Sviet Rus and Mogami were searching each other out while also attempting to take a certain action. And she was pretty sure she knew who had arranged this behind the scenes: ...*The Musashi Vice President, right!?*

Shigenaga was confused as she listened to Yoshiyasu.

...*It's true Mogami would want the rights of our defeat to establish the Punishment of Aizu.*

But this was a negotiation. *They were meant to make deals concerning those rights.*

Thus, Shigenaga asked a question as the representative present.

“What does Mogami intend to give us in exchange for the rights of a Sviet Rus loss?”

“Judge,” replied Yoshiyasu.

After a look back at the Reine des Garous and Yoshiaki, she faced Shigenaga once more.

And with a hand on her chest, she stated it plainly.

“We offer one thing: the rights of our victory over Mouri.”

“That's it, Shigenaga-kun!”

A white demon emperor stood up in the great hall of Sviet Rus's Kasuga Gora Kremlin.

It was Kagekatsu. After nodding back at Saitou's nod, he yelled into the *sankt okno* opened in front of him.

“That will allow us to let go of Houjou's rights! ...Shigenaga-kun, continue the negotiation!”

For a moment, Shigenaga was not sure what Kagekatsu was after.

*...What good are Mouri's rights for Sviet Rus?*

Mouri was the major Western European nation of Hexagone Française. Sviet Rus was a major northern nation.

"Please wait a moment."

She opened a *sankt okno* with her right hand while dropping the egg into her rice bowl and mixing it in.

She called up a map of the Far East centered on Sviet Rus.

*...Let's look at the two nations' locations...*

They were both located on the northern edge of the Far East, but they were split to the east and west.

"————"

Viewing the map told her what Kagekatsu had meant.

*...So that's it!*

Her understanding soon led to words. She sent an immediate reply back to her home nation.

"Testament, Chancellor. ...I will do as you wish."

She had not finished it, but the curry would have to wait. She hurriedly turned 90 degrees to the right.

She held her heels together and faced the Mogami Representative who stood in front of her. And she placed a hand on her chest.

"Testament. I agree to trade the rights of an Uesugi loss for your rights of a victory over Mouri. Please wait until I have collected those rights from Date."

*...That was a quick decision.*

Ookubo was astonished by the Sviet Rus leaders' response.

Houjou rights or Mouri rights.

Uesugi Kagekatsu had not hesitated over that choice.

It was a decision between expanding their nation to the south or the north. For a northern nation like Sviet Rus, southern Houjou land had to be attractive.

But Kagekatsu had made his decision.

*...He focused on the utility.*

Ookubo turned just her head toward the Reine des Garous standing behind her.

“They’re establishing their influence over northern trading routes, aren’t they?”

“Testament, that would be it.”

The Reine des Garous opened a *signe cadre* which displayed a Far Eastern map centered on Hexagone Française.

And she pointed at Sviet Rus.

“By gaining the rights of a victory over Mouri, I believe Sviet Rus intends to establish a trading pact with Hexagone Française and build a largescale trading post in Hexagone Française. And by doing that...” Her finger drew a line between Sviet Rus and Hexagone Française. “They can establish trade between Sviet Rus and Hexagone Française. But even with two major nations involved, that would be rather lonely. So...”

She moved her finger north from Hexagone Française.

“England. Sviet Rus is already on friendly terms with England. But England and Hexagone Française have never gotten along. So Sviet Rus can position themselves as an intermediary for trade between the two nations. Combine that with trips to and from Sviet Rus and they will have established triangular trade.”

“Judge. But it isn’t just that, is it?” Ookubo shifted her gaze sideways from the Reine des Garous. “Since Mogami began this conversation, Mogami must be a part of this trade line. In a way, Mogami will benefit from it the most. They’ll be able to acquire Western European goods from Sviet Rus, Pacific goods from Date, and other trade goods from Edo. And if Ushuu is included in the trade line

as a producer of rice, a certain something will happen.”

That was...

“Currently, Hexagone Française is earning a lot of foreign currency with their immense food production and exports thereof. But if Mogami joins the trade line, the value of exported food will greatly fall. At the very least, Hexagone Française will no longer be able to use their food exports to remain internationally competitive with England and Eastern Europe. That would be great for Sviet Rus since they have influence in Eastern Europe. Mogami would love it too. ...But are you sure you want that, Hexagone Française?”

“Oh? But the age of gathering foreign currency with food has ended. We are already shifting to an age of gathering a national army. Also...” The Reine Des Garous narrowed her eyes. “If Musashi defeats P.A. Oda and Hashiba, the situation will change yet again.”

Her finger raced across the Far Eastern map: along the northern coast from Eastern Europe to Northern Europe.

“If this long coastal belt from Sviet Rus to Hexagone Française is entirely held by the Testament Union, Hexagone Française will be able to negotiate with it all. ...Of course, Sviet Rus is sure to show off their influence as well, but there is a religious difference there.”

From Eastern Europe to Northern Europe, the Tsirhc Catholics prevailed. Sviet Rus was Tsirhc as well, but they were Orthodox, a different form of Catholicism.

Once those nations escaped P.A. Oda’s influence and returned to their original form, sectarian differences would become an issue.

“But even so, that and the triangular trade from before are markets worth attempting for Sviet Rus. It would create a sphere of trade influence akin to the full return of the defunct Hanseatic League.”

That was true. And that sphere of influence would work alongside the trade route with Edo.

They would be able to trade for Mogami’s food, Date’s Pacific products, and European products.

It was no exaggeration to say it would connect Kantou with Europe.  
However...

“There’s a bit of a problem for Sviet Rus. ...They’re a little behind in the development of aerial ships, aren’t they?”

“Yes, their hulk-style ships are designs from the age of the Hanseatic League... But Musashi can intervene and help them out there, can’t you?”

This woman was frightening because she could read things so far ahead. But...  
*...Sviet Rus is steering west.*

Thinking back, the attack on Novgorod had been laying the groundwork.  
Novgorod had been a major western barrier, but it had returned to Sviet Rus.  
They would be planning out a way of reviving it as a trade city in that region, but they may have set out on this adventure specifically because this was the planning phase. And...

“Now they’re going to turn this deal around.”

Ookubo saw Shigenaga turn around.

She had been facing Ookubo before, but now she turned her back.

She instead faced Date Narumi.

And she spoke to Narumi with her heels together.

“Rights of our defeat just passed to Mogami. With that, I say the Punishment of Aizu has been established between Sviet Rus, Date, and Mogami.”

*...She’s really putting herself at risk here.*

Her nation’s defeat was part of the history recreation, but she had named her nation first when listing them. Also, she had made sure to protect her nation by saying this was *her* saying it.

These were the words of an important retainer to a major nation.

And Shigenaga did not stop there. She was a representative who carried her nation’s future on her shoulders. She seemed to be rushing a bit through her

words as she spoke.

“With that complete, I would like to negotiate with Date once more. ...Sviet Rus would like the rights of Uesugi’s defeat which your nation possesses. In exchange...”

She took a breath.

“We will provide Date with the rights of a victory over Houjou.”

Yoshiyasu sweated in her heart.

*...This negotiation is completely rigged...!*

It was officially a negotiation between the three nations.

But Sviet Rus was currently making a fictional deal over rights.

After all, Date’s rights of Uesugi’s defeat were already being used to establish Russia’s negotiation with Mogami. And after receiving Mouri’s rights from Mogami, they were practically forcing the rights of a victory over Houjou onto Date.

When Date handed over their rights of a victory over Uesugi, Sviet Rus would pass them onto Mogami.

This was obviously a fictional deal meant to make everything work out in the end.

But there were only three nations in the negotiation and Musashi could not officially intervene. So...

“Judge. I accept,” said the Date Vice Chancellor while eating her grilled vegetable meal. “Let’s trade my rights of a victory over Uesugi for your rights of a victory over Houjou.”

*Good*, thought Masazumi while clenching a fist in her heart.

Ookubo’s sign frame commentary said the three nations’ rights negotiation was complete.



*...So Houjou's rights have passed to Date.*

*Not far now*, she thought just as the Tachibana Wife mentioned something she had just realized.

"If the Siege of Odawara ends like this, won't the Treasurer and Treasurer's Aide still be undone?"

Everyone exchanged a glance at that.

"...As far as punishments go, it certainly is, um, uh, stylish."

"A-Adele...I think you...chose the...wr-wrong word."

"What's the right word in this case?"

"Judge. ...Anyway, Masazumi-sama, Houjou's rights remain with Date, correct? How is Musashi going to receive them from Date?"

"That is a good question," said Mitotsudaira. "Who can we send as a negotiator?"

Tenzou crossed his arms and groaned.

"Yeah, Shirojiro-dono was injured pretty badly..."

"I guess he couldn't do a prostration then. ...How about Auge-chan?"

"Good idea," replied Mitotsudaira before suddenly looking up. "Where is Heidi, anyway?"

"Huh...?" everyone said while looking around.

Masazumi sighed at that. She lightly clapped her hands and smiled with eyebrows raised.

"Not to worry. That just means things are already set up and in motion. Now, we just finished some rights laundering, but what is the real problem facing us? Does anyone know?"

"That would be the rights of a victory over Houjou, Masazumi-sama."

"Judge," Masazumi replied to Horizon. "We will now have those transferred to Musashi. ...No matter what it takes."

Narumi saw a few different currents in motion concerning her and Musashi's situation.

And as a result...

"Judge. So you are the one to make an appearance."


Someone stood in the center of attention where the various national representatives were gathered at the food cart.

"Musashi Treasurer's Aide. ...What do you need?"

## **Chapter 62: Waiters on the Dry Land**

# 第六十二章

## 『枯渴大地の伏せ者達』



さあ  
追い詰まってきた  
だけど敵も同じ  
皆同じ  
配点（相手を見ろ）

*Now*

*We're cornered*

*But so is the enemy*

*So is everyone*

### **Point Allocation (Look to Your Opponent)**

Narumi's opponent said nothing while standing in a relaxed pose.

That opponent was Treasurer's Aide Heidi Augesvarer.

She simply stood there with the wind blowing across her summer uniform. And she looked to Narumi and spoke.

"Greed leads to failure. Shiro-kun is injured and, after a quick chat, he said he would entrust this to me, so I have taken his place as his aide."

"I see," replied Narumi. She did not particularly care if the aide took his place. Besides: "He can't prostrate properly while injured, can he?"

"You would think so, wouldn't you?"

The Treasurer's Aide wrinkled her brow and spread her mouth horizontally.

But once she took a breath, she held her right hand out toward Narumi. She held a white handkerchief in it.

"Shiro-kun left this 130 yen with me. He said he would entrust this to me, so I'll be using this money."

And she suddenly moved.

She got down on her knees, placed her hands in front of her, sat down on her lower legs, and placed her forehead in front.

"Please sell Houjou's rights for this!"

It was a ridiculous prostration.

Mogami Yoshiaki assessed the Treasurer's Aide's action.

*...She moves quite efficiently.*

Unlike the boy's prostrations, hers was a tranquil one that adjusted her posture as if placing herself inside an invisible box.

The money from before was placed in front of her on the handkerchief as an offering. Refusing to let the money touch the ground may have been a sign of her pride as a merchant.

Everything about her posture was directed downwards.

Her prostration attempted to place herself lower than her opponent no matter what, as if burying herself in the ground.

*...She has excellent movement.*

It was not too light but not too heavy either. It was always directed downwards and she seemed to continue rubbing her forehead against the ground.

And the current stage was good too.

She was in public. National representatives were watching, but she still performed the prostration.

Also, she had no money.

"Yes, this is a ridiculous prostration meant to force through a ridiculous request."

Yoshiaki smiled bitterly when Yoshiyasu gave her a puzzled look.

"A splendid move. Prostrations exist to force through ridiculous requests such as this. So they are best performed when you have lost everything, thrown out even your pride, and have nothing to bargain with and no value as a living being."

That was why the Treasurer had given his aide the paltry sum of money and "entrusted it to her". The merchant could still fight even now. And she was the only one he could rely on while injured.

"Do you understand the true essence of a prostration? It is not an unsightly means of apologizing."

Instead...

“There is a goal they must achieve even if it requires prostration. ...And when that resonates with their opponent, their request will be accepted.”

Narumi looked to the prostration in front of her.

*...Expecting this to get their debt forgiven is ridiculous.*

The Treasurer behind this prostration had lost to Narumi and to Houjou.

Musashi currently had one loss against Houjou.

So even if Narumi gave them the rights of a victory over Houjou, it would only cancel out that loss and not give them approval to enter the ruins.

*...But.*

Narumi knew someone else was in charge of fighting for that.

“The Musashi Vice President.”

That girl was sure to do something about it. And this Treasurer’s Aide knew it. No, not just her. The Chancellor, Narumi’s partner, and everyone else understood that.

If they gained these Houjou rights, the Musashi Vice President would do something about the rest.

That was the reason for this prostration. So...

“—————”

Narumi raised her right leg and instantly stomped it back down.

She did not hold back.

“I am ‘angry’. That’s enough, right?”

Meaning...

“I am furious at the power of your prostration, but I accept because that is how it works. ...And in exchange for my loss here, I will give Musashi the rights for my victory over Houjou.”

She spoke down at where her heel had stopped a mere 5mm above the Treasurer's Aide's head.

Houjou Ujinao looked up at the sky.

The cloudy sky was scarlet. The summer evening was gradually reaching its end.

But a sign frame appeared in the sky.

*...The Musashi Vice President?*

Yes, she thought to herself. *They must have settled everything by now.*

"What is it? Are you prepared to head to Kanie Castle?"

"Judge. We have managed to cancel out our loss to Houjou."

Ujinao knew what the Musashi Vice President meant. In what could be seen as the final battle of the Siege of Odawara, Musashi had defeated Date and acquired the rights of a victory over Houjou.

"But that only cancels out Katou Yoshiaki's win for us. ...In other words, you still do not have a victory over Houjou," said Ujinao. "Besides, I still remain here."

"I have an idea and a suggestion concerning that." The Musashi Vice President's words reverberated through the wind. "A transport ship heading here from Suwa should arrive soon."

"—————"

"If possible, we would like to swap out one of our representatives. The new representative will fight in what I imagine will be the final duel of the Siege of Odawara. And..."

And...

"We will leave soon for Kanie Castle."

"We still don't know if your new representative will win."

"Oh, he will. Our idiot has taken on his impossibility. ...So it's impossible for



him to lose.”

“Testament. Be prepared for what will happen if this does not go as planned.”

“Judge,” she replied with a bitter smile. “Thanks, Houjou Ujinao.”

The divine transmission ended there. And Ujinao spoke.

“The rulers of the coming age thanked me. ...If that is Houjou’s final grade, it may not be a bad reward for a doomed Preta.”

By the time Kotarou viewed the encampment, it was all over.

She had not known it was over.

But she had guessed it would probably be over by now, so she stepped through the encampment’s curtain.

There she found a cloudy sky and a plaza.

Ujinao stood there with automatons waiting at a distance.

The scarlet of the sky was deepening, but Ujinao’s clothes were white below that sky.

“Ujinao-sama! Are you injured!?”

Kotarou knew without asking that she was unhurt.

But she noticed something while running over to make sure.

Something was scattered at Ujinao’s feet.

Something was broken beyond recognition. Every piece had shattered like an eggshell, making it unidentifiable.

And she heard Ujinao’s voice.

“I had the brain retrieved. ...As it was a duel.”

“T-testament! ...Ujinao-sama, um, uh.”

“Testament. That uncle was useless in the duels and holds no meaning after this, so I erred in my judgment of him. ...Kotarou, you were correct to dislike him.”

Ujinao kept her eyes on the sky as she spoke. But after a while...

“Kotarou? What is wrong? I am saying you defeated me.”

“No, um...”

Kotarou was unsure if she should say what she had just realized and thought.

But conviction as a Mouse put it to words.

“Ujinao-sama,” said Kotarou. “I have determined that Ujiteru-sama retired in the best possible way.”

“...Is that so?” Ujinao did not look down from the sky. “Then I must trust you there. After all, your judgment of him was more correct than mine.”

“Testament! That’s right! Please think that!”

Kotarou looked to the same part of the sky as Ujinao as she spoke.

She looked north to the Suwa sky as she formed the words.

“Someone is sure to be here soon! Someone who will not allow you to be alone!”

Just as Kotarou tried to say more, Ujinao scooped her up in her hands.

Kotarou saw that Ujinao’s eyes were exposed.

They were gold. A trail of residual light followed their movement as they looked at Kotarou.

“That goes without saying.”

And Ujinao gently hugged Kotarou.

“Kotarou. ...That description fits you perfectly.”

*...It’s over.*

Narumi looked up into the cloudy evening sky as she viewed the results and following actions on her sign frame.

The duels of the Siege of Odawara were effectively over. A duel between Houjou and Musashi remained, but Musashi would move to the Kanie Castle

battlefield first.

Narumi would likely be placed on the rear guard for that.

The nations would be planning what to do about their various rights. And after seeing the result of the Siege of Kanie Castle, they would decide what to do during the Kantou Liberation.

The Kantou Liberation would begin tomorrow. Or tonight depending on what happened at Paris.

“See, look at that.”

The Reine des Garous pointed to a dark spot in the eastern sky.

The Hashiba fleet stationed in the Edo region had taken flight and was beginning to transport supplies and establish a formation.

“And more are coming from the northwest.”

Those would be reinforcements from P.A. Oda.

Groups of warships with numbers in the double digits were moving slowly but boldly while accompanied by transport ships. They were all moving from the northwest to the east. They showed no response to anything happening at Odawara, but because of that...

“They’re ready to do this, aren’t they? Look at that ship in the lead.”

Narumi looked where Ookubo’s white prosthetic arm was pointing.

The ironclad ship leading the fleet to Edo bore a name on its side.

“The Toba Castle...!? That’s Kuki Yoshitaka’s fleet.”

“Testament.” Yoshiaki covered her mouth with a fan. “They’ve sent a troublesome group. ...We’ll need to be careful.”

Everyone agreed with that.

And Narumi wondered when the real explosion would happen.

If the Punishment of Houjou and the Siege of Kanie Castle were the fuse for the great battlefield of Kantou, at what point in the Kantou Liberation would the greatest explosion occur? Also...

“I hear Paris is at a standstill. Are these coals still only smoldering?”

“Aren’t things progressing oddly?”

A while before the end of Odawara, someone voiced a question on a battlefield surrounded by green fields.

Hashiba’s forces surrounded Paris on all sides and it was the northern formation that noticed the oddity.

Physical shell attacks were coming from Paris without rest.

And the enemy had set up a defensive formation without being pushed back.

But the enemy would occasionally advance and somewhat reduce the distance between them. Each time, Hashiba would also move to deter them. Then the artillery would alter its angle and attack the Hashiba formation after its move.

It was a boring but effective attack.

The Hashiba formation could not avoid some disarray while exposed to concentrated shellfire.

As a result, they would move toward spots receiving fewer attacks, but...

“...This is strange.”

Kiyomasa, who led the northern unit, had noticed a few oddities.

She knew the Paris forces had stopped making proactive attacks.

But after a few hours of shellfire and skirmishes, a thought occurred to her.

*...This is odd.*

One oddity stood out in particular.

“Why haven’t the Seine’s waters risen?”

*...Is the water leaking out somewhere?*

Kiyomasa was to the north. The Seine flowed from the south, passed through

Paris, and left to the northwest. Including the moat dug around Paris, the Seine flowed in front of them from left to right.

But the river's water level had not risen.

The Seine had been blocked up and the armor panel breakwaters set up around Paris would hold the water in. That was Hashiba's strategy. Downstream to the west, the Seine was blocked up and the water was overflowing its banks.

At around mid-afternoon, the water spreading across the downstream area should have flooded this wheat field.

But the scene before Kiyomasa's eyes appeared no different from when the battle had begun.

The water was blocked downstream to the west and it had formed a shallow lake there, but...

*...The water isn't spreading any further than that?*

The moats would be playing a role there.

But there was no sign of those moats filling with water either.

This oddity was clear to her specifically because she was in the north where she could view Paris from downstream. And she sent word of it to Takenaka via divine transmission.

"Takenaka-sama. ...It doesn't look like the floodwaters are rising very much. Can you make a decision about this from where you are?"

"Yeah, I had a feeling."

Takenaka readily admitted it.

Shells landed around Kiyomasa, but she chose to ignore them.

To check on the others' situation, she posted on the divine chat.

**Kiyo-Massive:** "Directional commanders, have you noticed anything about the floodwaters?"

**Llaf:** "There is no change here in the east. We are waiting for the floodwaters to arrive from thy direction, but progress appears to be slow."

□□凸: “The flooding isn’t supposed to have started here yet, so it’s impossible to tell...”

6: “Things are submerged here, but it is true the spread is slow.”

**Kiyo-Massive:** “Slow?”

6: “Testament, the flooding won’t spread. It looks like it disappears somewhere up ahead. It is gradually spreading, but is it supposed to be faster?”

**Kuro-Take:** “Hm.”

Kiyomasa tilted her head at Takenaka’s comment.

**Kiyo-Massive:** “Is something wrong, Takenaka-sama?”

**Kuro-Take:** “No, I set up a lot of different tricks, so this should turn out fine. I feel like the other side is self-destructing here, so it would be best not to react.”

**Llaf:** “Are thou saying we have a plan even if things do not flood, so we should not worry?”

**Kuro-Take:** “Hmm.”

**Kiyo-Massive:** “It’s not really a plan, but I do recall hearing about a rather forceful move before we left. Do you really think that will work?”

She tried asking and Takenaka did not hesitate to respond.

**Kuro-Take:** “With Hashiba-kun’s current power, whoever makes the claim first wins, so it should be fine. But we aren’t quite prepared for that. Umm, are each of the directions listening?”

Takenaka spoke to them all.

**Kuro-Take:** “The command I’m about to give is a two-stage command with a time delay between, but please obey it. If the other side self-destructs, we’ll escape unscathed, but if they make a certain decision...”

Then...

**Kuro-Take:** “We’ll carry out the second stage of the command for a high damage exchange from 7 to 8 PM. Please be ready for that.”

“Henri, the enemy is on the move.”

Armand viewed the Hashiba forces to the west from atop Paris’s walls. He opened a telescope spell while calling Henri on a *signe cadre*.

The *Belle de Marionnettes* were alternately checking the range and firing. *Belle de Marionnettes* carrying spell gunpowder and artillery shells were using stairs to climb up and down the city wall. And with the din of cannon fire in the background...

“Armand, I can see it to the north too. It looks like units have set up a rotation of falling back to the transport ship behind them and then returning.”

“Do you know what they’re doing?”

“Eating? No, it looks like they are receiving portable food and drink. Humans need a lot of water during this season.”

“And they can’t just drink the Seine’s water.”

With that, Armand opened another *signe cadre*.

It displayed the Roi-Soleil buying fruits at the market.

“Roi-Soleil, what will you do?”

“My role is to fortify the defense barriers with my Testamenta Arma. But if it is ever absolutely necessary that I take part in the fighting, just call for me. ... However, I hope that will not be necessary. Because I intend to improve my skills in cooking, which the Testament lists as one of my hobbies.” He held up an apple. “But if we have a plan, then so will they. ...When the enemy does something on the battlefield, you must assume it will lead to their victory somehow.”

“Agreed, Roi-Soleil,” said Bernard whose voice alone reached them from the southern wall. “No living being will take action for no reason. Meaningless actions are only taken by the dead. And the doomed. Roi-Soleil, *Belle de Marionnettes*, and everyone else...is this enemy dead or doomed?”

“They are not,” replied Miyoshi who was on the eastern wall with Danzou by his side. “At the very least, this enemy was able to do more than us.”

“Testament,” said Danzou. “If we are to provide death or doom for this

enemy, we must stick to it. Let us show them that we are capable of persistently seeing this through and seizing everything for ourselves.”

“Testament,” replied the Roi-Soleil. “Then take action, everyone. If the enemy has a plan, then so do we. We might be outwitted in a spectacular fashion, but there is one fundamental rule of battle.”

That being...

“Those who continue marching toward victory will win.”

□□凸: “The enemy is advancing! They’re coming this way!”

**Kuro-Take:** “Wow, they won’t even overlook our show of eating food? Just how cement-like are they?”

**6:** “...So Katagiri will be the first to fall.”

□□凸: “Th-the enemy is advancing on all of you as well! Please look!”

**Kiyo-Massive:** “Testament, they are indeed coming here. Except...”

**Llaf:** “What is it?”

**Kiyo-Massive:** “Testament, they have stopped after advancing about 200 meters. And I might be overreacting, but it feels strange.”

**6:** “Testament, I can see it too. They stopped after advancing about the same distance here. Since it’s the same with Kiyomasa, they must be *luring us in*.”

**Kuro-Take:** “You mean...?”

**6:** “They’ve moved to a position that hides as much of the Seine as possible from us.”

**Llaf:** “So they realized we have noticed the oddity in the water level?”

*Oh, no*, thought Takenaka.

She was setting up a “last resort”. If she set that in motion, they would quickly approach victory.

And at the moment, they needed to buy time and distract the enemy so it



could be set in motion.

Because once it was in motion, it would be a short, decisive battle. The short-term battle would settle everything.

So since their preparations were not yet complete, she did not want the enemy to notice anything odd about their actions. However...

*...They're on the lookout...*

The enemy wanted to see if Hashiba had noticed the oddity in the water level.

They must have decided Hashiba would likely notice at around this time.

But they had still moved forward to see for sure.

Hiding the Seine was the enemy's tactic.

Of course, the Seine flowed across a large area of land and Hashiba's forces were all on elevated areas of land. They could still see most of the Seine from those vantage points.

But they could not take proper measurements with the enemy in the way.

To observe the Seine, they had to send out scouts or take some other kind of action.

**Kuro-Take:** "Hachisuka-kun? The water has spread a lot in your downstream area, but you mustn't do anything to measure the water level, okay?"

**6:** "I'll take a time-lapse recording with Genbu's vision. I doubt it will matter, though."

"But," said the girl.

**6:** "What game is the enemy playing here?"

"Testament," replied Takenaka while looking down at the deck below her feet.

There was something green there.

**Kuro-Take:** "It's the wheat."

Kiyomasa started to look around in response to what Takenaka said, but...

*...Oops, I shouldn't show any sign that I've realized something.*

**Kiyo-Massive:** “The wheat? It’s growing everywhere around here, so what about it?”

**Kuro-Take:** “You know this wheat is a product of selective breeding, don’t you? After all, this is not the season for wheat. It’s generally harvested at around May. ...So all of that growing around you is a new variety bred to grow enough for two crops a year.”

“Al – so,” said Takenaka.

**Kuro-Take:** “I had Katagiri-kun bring some here during the earliest stages, but...Katagiri-kun? How tall is the wheat you see around you now?”

□□凸: “Testament, it’s a little lower than the top of my legs.”

**Llaf:** “Is that about 80cm?”

**Tsurugi:** “81cm and 7mm is the average. It fluctuates a bit from day to day.”

**Kiyo-Massive:** “Oh, I remember you mentioning that before.”

□□凸: “Why do you know more about me than I do!?”

**6:** “Wait.”

Hachisuka curtly interrupted.

**6:** “It almost reaches my navel.”

**Llaf:** Is that about 90cm?”

**Tsurugi:** “Probably?”

**Kiyo-Massive:** “Hm, that does sound about right.”

□□凸: “Wh-why are you so much more unsure than with me!?”

**6:** “You creep.”

□□凸: “I wasn’t saying I wanted to know!”

**Kiyo-Massive:** “...Katagiri-kun? Saying that is rude to Hachisuka-san. You’ll regret it once she grows up into a very attractive woman. So apologize, okay?”

□□凸: “S-sorry...”

**6:** “Kiyomasa, you’re overprotective.”

Since she waited until he had apologized, Hachisuka must have wanted him to apologize.

*...But the height of the wheat is curious.*

**Kiyo-Massive:** “What does that mean? Is the wheat in the flooded areas growing?”

**Kuro-Take:** “Wheat does not require much water to grow, but it appears this variety is a little different. When given a certain amount of water, it sucks it all up and grows. So...”

So...

**Kuro-Take:** “The vast wheat fields surrounding Paris are soaking up the Seine’s floodwaters.”

Takenaka thought, *This must be a long-term trap.*

*...This wheat was a variety created via selective breeding to increase Hexagone Française’s food production.*

**Kuro-Take:** “But if it absorbs too much water, the quality drops, so they can’t export it. However, that doesn’t matter in an area with a poor food supply. For example, during war...or while cultivating the outside world.”

That was it.

This variety grew rapidly, but had too poor a taste for export. By linking that to Hexagone Française’s planned cultivation of the outside world and the flooding of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle, it had been used around Paris to research its production.

Hexagone Française must have been waiting for the Hashiba forces to get this close.

Wheat fields this large would likely be able to suck up all of the Seine’s water.

That explained the enemy’s confidence.

Then what were the Hashiba forces to do?

There was an option. Takenaka had prepared a Plan B in case the breakwaters were destroyed.

*...But this is not going to be easy.*

**6:** “What do we do? Play dumb? It would be hard to believe we still haven’t noticed anything.”

**Kuro-Take:** “If we show we’ve noticed, they’ll charge forward again. ...We still aren’t quite ready.”

**Kiyo-Massive:** “What exactly will we do?”

“Testament,” replied Takenaka.

**Kuro-Take:** “Some of the power being used for the breakwater defense barriers will be rerouted to the transport ships. To prepare for a long-term battle, please connect the ether pathways between the transport ships and the reinforcement facilities’ fuel systems. By my estimate, the preparations will be complete in about 3 hours. After that, we can flood Paris guaranteed.”

**6:** “And high damage is guaranteed too.”

“True,” agreed Takenaka.

Three hours from now meant 7 PM.

After the fighting following that and after resupplying, when could they return to Kantou?

*...Early tomorrow morning.*

That was later than planned. *In the worst case anyway*, sighed Takenaka.

*...I should probably tell Hashiba-kun sooner rather than later...*

**Kuro-Take:** “We need to fool them for another 3 hours. Let’s try not to provoke them too much. We need to make it look like we’re settling in for a long-term battle. ...Let’s play dumb.”

The Roi-Soleil walked through a Paris street holding a basket filled with a towering pile of apples.

There was a security *Belle de Marionnette* behind him, but his gait was carefree and he would bow or raise a hand in greeting when he saw someone. He started with a woman selling fried snacks on the street.

“Roi-Soleil! Will you be cooking with Lady Anne’s favorite: apples!?”

“Ha ha ha. That’s the plan anyway.”

“Roi-Soleil! Aren’t all those apples heavy!?”

“Ha ha ha. The basket is a bit prickly when it touches me down below!”

“Roi-Soleil! Should I strip too!?”

“Ha ha ha. ...Guards, arrest this criminal.”

“What about you!?”

The Roi-Soleil responded to everyone’s accusation with a flare and a spinning turn.

“I am a natural-born nudist. I am nothing like that faker from Musashi.”

Everyone started whispering.

“...So it is bothering him.”

“...He must have hated being beaten by a crossdresser.”

“...He can’t pull off a naked apron after all.”

He shook his head at their quiet voices.

“It is a trivial matter. ...The sun only need remain in its natural state.”

He then opened a *signe cadre*.

“Henri, I would like to know how to cook an apple tart, so introduce me to a good cook. Also, it seems a festival has begun outside.”

“Testament. Some of the Hashiba forces have begun a history recreation of the festival while they resupply. They have an orchestra hiding behind them playing loud music.”

“They are playing dumb. Because they must have noticed what is happening by now. ...They cannot complete their flooding with the Seine’s waters. And we dug deep ditches around Paris, so we are prepared to stop a ground attack. Do

you know what happens then?”

“The enemy will see there is nothing they can do and the Princess can complete the Kantou Liberation in the meantime.”

“No. Hashiba is playing dumb here, so they must have a plan. A plan to complete the flooding instead of having to flee from here.”

“It couldn’t be...” said Henri before stopping and starting again. “No, you’re right. They must have a plan to complete the flooding.”

“Testament. That is why they have not fled.”

The Roi-Soleil resumed walking. Walking toward a garden in northern Paris.

That was his current home: the Louvre Palace.

The garden had been opened up during the battle as a place for the people to rest.

He walked toward that calm place.

“Everyone, advance close enough to make your very best attack. And from there, make yourself an audience for their terrible performance. As soon as they try something, immediately crush them.”

“Roi-Soleil, how far along do you think the enemy’s preparations are?”

“Armand, can you perform simple arithmetic?” He smiled. “The Siege of Odawara is underway in Kantou. I imagine it will be complete by 6 PM. Then Musashi will begin the Siege of Kanie Castle. ...At most, that will take 2 or 3 hours.”

If a break period and the invasion of Edo followed after that...

“The Kantou Liberation will likely begin at around 2 AM tomorrow.”

The Roi-Soleil thought, *That battle is sure to end by the time the morning sun has risen.*

“That battle will likely last about 4 hours. It will be over at 6 tomorrow morning.”

*...I just hope the sun will protect Terumoto.*

Worrying for her was the prideful thing to do. Because it assumed she was lacking in strength and needed assistance.

But Hashiba's actions were a problem.

"Let us calculate in reverse. The Musashi once traveled from M.H.R.R. to Kantou in about 4 hours. We estimate the Azuchi Castle's speed is about equivalent to the Musashi's. It is a giant and ridiculously fast ship, but if you include the time needed to collect their warriors and gather the individual ships, it should take 6 hours to reach Kantou. ...Also, they must resupply for what they have used here. After all, going to Kantou while low on supplies would be their downfall."

He could predict the amount of supplies and the time it would require based on the recent observations of the Azuchi.

"About 2 hours. ...So 8 hours in all."

Meaning...

"If Hashiba is held here until 10 PM, they will not arrive in time for the 6 AM ending of the Kantou battle. So what is it we must do, Danzou?"

"Testament. Observe them after 5. And if we can tell they are preparing an imminent attack..." Danzou spoke with the distinctive low and quiet voice of an old man. "We crush them. Or hold them here until after 10."

"Precisely, Danzou. ...There is also the previous generation's grudge. I do not know what they will try to do, but we must swiftly analyze it and prepare some means of delaying them. Listen," said the Roi-Soleil. "It appears as if the enemy has nothing prepared. In that case, what do you think they will use? Bernard, do you know?"

"Spells." The reply was immediate. "Humans have long relied on spells when they lack equipment."

"Exactly. So we must monitor the ley line movements and determine where the ether readings are concentrated. Then we do what we can to harass them."

With that, the Roi-Soleil continued forward. He set foot in the garden and

smiled.

“I wonder if apple tarts are good when freshly baked. I should have asked Terumoto.”

While the cloudy sky was dyed in the colors of evening, Terumoto received a question from Mouri-01.

“Princess, the Roi-Soleil would like to know if freshly baked apple tarts are good.”

“Huh? Can’t he figure that out on his own by baking one and eating it?”

“Princess? I think he wants to eat it with you.”

“I see.” Terumoto lifted up the book she was reading and looked to the sky. “Then tell him not to bother with a freshly baked one. I’ll probably be back in three days, so have him bake one we can eat then.”

“Testament, I will pass along your message.”

After that, Mouri-01 followed Terumoto’s gaze into the sky.

A giant ship’s silhouette was slowly moving there.

“Musashi is headed for Kanie Castle, aren’t they?”

“Once the Siege of Kanie Castle is complete, we need to immediately go over the rights from the Siege of Odawara and prepare for the Kantou Liberation. But...” Terumoto looked Mouri-01 in the eye. “The transition has gone pretty smoothly for us. So tell our idiot to do his thing without worrying. ...Our stupid sun shines on Hexagone Française even at night. Right?”

While Hashiba and Hexagone Française made their moves in the west, the scarlet sky rapidly grew dark starting from the east.

Evening was becoming night.

Takenaka took a certain action from a position giving a view of that time change.



She was vomiting over the edge of the deck.

“Ero ero ero ero.”

**Azuchi:** “Takenaka-sama, I would like to focus exclusively on operating the ship, so could you please refrain from taking such actions? Over.”

**Kuro-Take:** “Oh, sorry, sorry, ‘Azuchi’. I had you make so many adjustments and here I am getting in your-ero ero ero.”

□□凸: “T-Takenaka-san! Calm down a little!”

**Kuro-Take:** “No, that’s not happening. Things are pretty bad right now.”

**Kiyo-Massive:** “Did something happen?”

**Kuro-Take:** “Testament. I’ve been sending ether fuel to the transport ships this whole time, right? But a lot of that fuel is being lost to ley line interference.”

**6:** “Is Paris causing it?”

**Kuro-Take:** “You get it?”

Hachisuka responded with a “testament”.

**6:** “Measure it while ‘Azuchi’ has some spare time. A massive amount of ether fuel is being consumed in Paris. It’s probably for the festival inside and to strengthen the defense barriers with the Roi-Soleil’s Testamenta Arma.”

**Llaf:** “It feels like they are standing up to the night, does it not?”

The enemy was preparing everything they had.

Hashiba’s forces were transferring ether fuel from the reinforcement facilities set up along the breakwaters to the transport ships.

That was because Hexagone Française’s wheat fields had rendered the breakwaters meaningless.

And the Plan B they were preparing in secret required the transport ships and lots of ether fuel.

So the breakwaters were being used as a pipeline to send ether fuel to the transport ships. However...

**Kuro-Take:** “The ley lines are interfering, probably because the breakwaters are stabbed into the ground. And I guess because Paris is consuming so much ether all at once, the ether of our fuel is being consumed too.”

**Kiyo-Massive:** “In that case, when will the necessary fuel be gathered in the transport ships?”

**Nari Nari Nari:** “Hello, everyone. It is nice to speak with you again after so long. ...My preparations are complete, so I performed the measurements for you. Most likely, the target amount will be reached at 8 PM.”

**6:** “So we’ll reach the Kantou Liberation with 2 hours to spare?”

**Nari Nari Nari:** “No. ...The length of the fighting here will influence it.”

**Monkey Girl:** “Mitsunari-san? Let’s make some final adjustments to your exterior, okay?”

**Nari Nari Nari:** “Hashiba-sama, you need not call me that just because I am complete...”

**Monkey Girl:** “No, no. Calling you by your model number or compatibility would be rude at this point.”

**Llaf:** “So Mitsunari-dono will finally be able to stand alongside us.”

Takenaka gasped a bit at what Fukushima said.

*...So it’s finally happening...*

**Kuro-Take:** “Mitsunari-kun, the eight of you, and I will finally be together.”

“Then,” said Takenaka.

**Kuro-Take:** “I will ensure we complete the flooding no matter what. I will use all of you and it will require high damage, but it will happen. So afterwards...”

**Monkey Girl:** “Testament, we do everything we can and make the Great Return.”

Exactly.

Takenaka took a breath and checked the time on her *lernen figur*. It was almost 7 PM.

*...One more hour. If we can hold off an attack until then, we can win this.*

*I need to do my best, she thought. But just then...*

□□凸: “Everyone! ...I’m detecting an ether reading from the back of the enemy formations! There are large ether readings moving to the front of the east, west, and north formations! Their god of war unit is on the move!”

As soon as Katagiri’s words ran across the screen, the outskirts of Paris were filled with light.

In front of the enemy formations that extended far to either side, light scattered across an area of the same length but several times as high.

They were defense barriers raised skywards. And they were carried by...

□□凸: “Middle gods of war! These are rows of Hexagone Française middle gods of war specialized for defense!”

Kiyomasa saw a familiar enemy in the center of her vision: middle gods of war.

These could be seen as the enemy’s main fighting force, but they had appeared at the opening stage of the fighting.

They were deployed in three directions: the west and north that led to the downstream region and the western downstream region itself.

“So they’re finally here.”

She had clashed with these middle gods of war during the beginning of their invasion of Hexagone Française.

She remembered being made a fool of by Hexagone Française’s new weapons and new tactics. So...

“I must vindicate myself.”

While the middle gods of war slowly approached, she saw an enemy on Paris’s wall behind them.

It was a female automaton in a red coat: Henri the Musketeer.

**Kuro-Take:** “So they’re trying to ‘shake’ us. I doubt they intend to make a direct strike at this point, but they will do so before 8. They have Terrestrial Dragons too, so please be careful, everyone.”

**Llaf:** “What are thy orders for us?”

**Kuro-Take:** “I want you to endure the enemy’s attacks until at least after 8. And after that, just keep it up until the flooding is complete.”

**6:** “That’s easier said than done.”

**Kuro-Take:** “If I said it in a more difficult way, it would only depress you.”

Was that Takenaka’s form of kindness?

Still, it felt like they finally had a goal.

The enemy had made their presence known. *Then we must do the same,* thought Kiyomasa while opening her mouth before the middle god of war unit that had come to a stop.

“So our instructions are simple: just fight.”

# Chapter 63: Water Provider on the Thirsty Battlefield

# 第六十三章

## 『渴望戦場の水源手』

逆転の合図とは  
文字通りの背水と言えるのか  
配点（水は何处？）



*Is the sign of a comeback*

*Literally having your back to the water?*

### **Point Allocation (Where's the Water?)**

Below the night sky, the battle on the green field began with advance and retreat.

The Hexagone Française forces led by middle gods of war moved forward to secure the position for a charge.

Meanwhile, the Hashiba forces moved back to take the position for intercepting the middle gods of war.

All actions were made swiftly on this battlefield. Paris stood at the center of the war stage with the breakwaters surrounding it, so it was shaped somewhat like the inside of a pot.

The height difference was only about 10 meters, but that height was enough for Hashiba to use for their angle of fire and defense. And one's weight became a greater issue when making a charge against them.

Also, the Hashiba forces altered their formation in response to the middle gods of war.

While the Hexagone Française middle gods of war advanced, they passed by their own warriors on the side.

Kiyomasa commented on the situation to the east, west, and north.

"From here on, the gods of war will be the enemy's main force."

**6:** "Their heavy gods of war will be coming too, so the immediate fight won't be the end of it."

**Kuro-Take:** "Then we'll just have to keep the battlefield moving as quickly as possible."

As the Hashiba forces discussed the situation, the Hexagone Française middle gods of war began to enter the space between Hashiba and Paris.

But they did not place Paris directly behind them.

They angled themselves diagonally to Hashiba as if to give the enemy a view of Paris.

That was a way to ensure the artillery fire from Paris could continue.

Attacks were already flying back and forth in the space between the two sides.

Hexagone Française had their middle god of war units out front and they fired from the gaps between those machines.

Meanwhile, Hashiba fired from diagonally above and from the light warships in the sky.

But Hashiba was at a disadvantage here.

While the middle god of war units opened defense barriers and blocked the aerial bombardment, the real issue was the increased accuracy of the supporting fire from Paris.

Hashiba's supporting fire was from aerial warships, but those floating ships were shaken by their own cannon blasts. Their cannons' aim shifted slightly with each shot, so their effectiveness dropped.

But Paris's cannons were affixed to the city walls, so they could use all the ranging data taken from the previous shots. Their cannons were controlled by automatons, so even though the long range weakened the shots, they still had destructive power if they reached the target.

The Hashiba forces were forced to change their position while fighting a defensive battle. And...

"Here they come!" shouted Katagiri. "The enemy's middle god of war units are charging!"

The anti-ship defense barriers raced forward while supported by hunks of metal.

The distance was approximately 800 meters. With the exception of the downstream western area, their route took them from a plain and up a slight hill.



“Go!”

They raised a cry and ran forward to pierce something, but that something was not the enemy themselves.

It was the breakwater walls behind the enemy.

If they were to stop Hashiba’s flooding, that had to be their priority target. And if they destroyed the downstream ones, Hashiba could make no excuses. So the middle *Lourd de Marionnette* units rushed toward the eastern, western, and northern breakwaters.

Of course, they knew the enemy was after something else now.

The enemy had realized they could not flood the Seine.

Readings said they were gathering ether fuel in the transport ships landed beyond the breakwaters.

Why had they given up on applying reinforcing divine protections on the breakwaters and instead returned the ether fuel to the ships?

The enemy had some kind of plan and it involved those transport ships.

But the breakwaters stood as barriers in front of the ships.

So...

“Go...!”

The breakwaters ahead of the middle *Lourd de Marionnette* units were also conduits for retrieving the ether fuel sent to the reinforcement facilities. Destroy them and the enemy would have nothing except for the large reinforcement facilities to supply the transport ships with ether fuel.

They had bought some time. It was past 7:30 PM.

Even if Hashiba began their Great Return now, the Kantou Liberation would be half over before they arrived.

If the middle *Lourd de Marionnette* units could fight here and delay them further...

“We’ll show you how it feels...!”

Hexagone Française had once arrived at the battlefield too late.

At Magdeburg.

They had arrived, but something important had slipped from their fingers.

So.

Back then, they had been on a hill overlooking a fortified city.

This was the same.

It was the same, but in reverse.

“Let’s go...!”

The enemy was straight ahead. Hashiba’s main force was there.

All the runners to the east, south, and west saw the enemy.

The middle *Lourd de Marionnette* units stared at the M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda warriors and shouted a contradiction.

“Outta the way! Hit them!”

They would hit them, but they would not aim. Their targets were the breakwaters behind the enemy.

So they ran as if to pierce straight through the enemy.

“Go...!”

A great noise raced along the slope.

The Hashiba forces took a certain action in response to the racing middle gods of war.

They did the same thing to the east, west, and north.

“All units, form ranks...!”

They all took a single step, some diagonally to the left and some diagonally to the right. And that formed ranks with thrice the side-to-side density.

With the charge of large defense barriers bearing down on them, those on the far left and right of the ranks raised their voices.

“Open up to the sides...!”

Immediately, they all activated spells.

The M.H.R.R. warriors used body strengthening spells and the P.A. Oda warriors used wind spirits spells.

And they all kicked at the ground and ran to the left or right.

Hashiba’s main force split like an opening door. However...

“Ignore it!”

Meanwhile, the middle gods of war raised their voices and charged toward the breakwaters.

The breakwaters were made from layered and joined armor panels and they stood about 10 meters tall. Twice that height was embedded in the ground below them. Those walls were taller than the charging middle gods of war. So...

“Break through!”

In the instant of impact, all of the middle gods of war took the same action.

They thrust their defense barriers straight forward.

And they did so while positioning the barriers perpendicular to the armor panels.

As a result, there was a deafening noise of breaking metal.

The middle *Lourd de Marionnettes* had accomplished something: the destruction of the breakwaters.

“...!”

Their high-speed clash first produced a great roar. Then the perpendicular-oriented defense barriers broke through the breakwaters like the blade of a cutting machine.

The speed and weight of the *Lourd de Marionnettes* combined with the sharp corners of the barriers sliced through the breakwaters.

The cry of destruction was followed by the sound of the breakwaters being

sliced into a top and bottom half.

It was a sparking noise combined with the creak of stubborn metal snapping.

They were sliced through.

That simple action was accompanied by a great quantity of mass and ether light fragments.

The initial defense barriers shattered after bisecting the breakwaters. The next ones pushed at the broken-off tops of the breakwaters.

“Don’t flinch...!”

The continuous destruction of the defense barriers was what tore through and pushed away the severed breakwaters.

Due to their momentum, there was nothing more than a tremor on the ground.

Instead, the many middle *Lourd de Marionnettes* had their shoulders destroyed by the reactive force and the motors in their hips and legs groaned.

But it had been a success. And...

“So they’re here!”

Something arrived above the middle *Lourd de Marionnette* units that were stopped by the clash.

It was the warships overhead.

As the giant silhouette seemed to drop down toward them, they directed their shoulders upwards.

“Here come the warship bombs...!”

The middle *Lourd de Marionnette* units lifted up their straining bodies and created defense barriers toward the sky.

“Come! We’re ready for you!”

“No. Henri, that is the wrong decision.”

On Paris’s wall, Henri was viewing the defensive arrangement of the middle

*Lourd de Marionnettes* and she did not even question the Roi-Soleil's words. She immediately sent a command using a divine transmission *signe cadre*.

"Middle *Lourd de Marionnette* units! Fall back!!"

She did not know why, but their Chancellor had pointed out a mistake in her decision.

So she raised her voice to correct it.

"Direct your defenses forward!"

Immediately, fire erupted from three directions around Paris.

These were explosions.

And they occurred where the middle *Lourd de Marionnette* units were.

But Henri's vision scanned the color red blossoming at the edge of the battlefield.

The explosions she could see had not come from the falling warships.

The row of destroyed breakwaters had exploded.

"Had they placed explosion spells in the breakwaters!?"

It was entirely possible. If an aerial ship's armor panel fell, it could do damage to the surface. For IZUMO, the Ariake, or other island and ships with a permanent position in the air, incendiary spells would be placed in their armor panels and other materials so they could be fully destroyed in midair.

The enemy had done the same thing here. And it was obvious who would have come up with the idea: " 'High Damage' Takenaka!"

Takenaka placed her hands on the edge of the Azuchi's bow deck and viewed the explosive conflagration.

From here, she could see the eastern fire was stronger than the western one. But...

"That's a little weak for a high return."

□□凸: "Eh!? Didn't this catch them right in the middle of it!?"

**Kiyo-Massive:** “No, they fell back and redirected their defenses just before taking damage! I doubt many of them took direct hits!”

Even so, it was still a close-range explosion. None of the middle gods of war would escape unscathed.

But that explosion had also used the portion of the breakwater armor panels that were buried underground.

So even if it was only a small hill...

“It’ll cause a landslide.”

She could hear the sound. Dirt was crumbling and sliding down.

The armor panels buried belowground had applied hoe-like damage to the crust.

The power of the explosions had ruptured the ground at the base of the hill more than the top. A vertical cross section was formed where the breakwaters had been, creating a deep drop off.

“This will make it impossible for their middle god of war units to rush the transport ships. Also...”

Takenaka saw the giant forms descending from the sky above the landslides.

Those were Hashiba light warships.

The light warships descended such that their sides were positioned alongside the crust cross section created in front of the transport ships.

The ships landed on the piles of destroyed earth.

The dirt supported the light warships like a blanket and the bottom of the ships sank into it a bit, but...

“Once the warships’ weight creates a mold of their shape in the ground, we will have created specialized landport docks.”

The flames of the explosions still burned as the black light warships landed on the collapsed crust with their lower half below the top of the hills.

That position perfectly defended the transport ships.

Takenaka's long ears twitched at the rumbling of landing ships and further shaking of the crust.

"Now. We may have lost the breakwaters, but the transport ships have new barriers. Plus, these barriers can fire and open defense barriers."

*...If we use the remaining breakwaters to transport the fuel, we've both made and lost some progress.*

In the end, all they had done was repel the enemy's vanguard and fortify their defenses. That was far from a high return.

And the enemy had not taken any clear damage to their middle god of war units. In that case...

"Is it time for the next move?"

Henri read through the damage reports from the middle *Lourd de Marionnette* units.

Not one of them was unharmed. They had taken explosions from head-on. Those who had gotten their defense barriers out front in time had fared relatively well, but those who had not had been knocked over and taken damage to their front armor and arms.

But none had been lost. That was all thanks to obeying the Roi-Soleil's words, but...

"Roi-Soleil, how did you know about the enemy's trick?"

Armand said "it was his...y'know, intuition" via divine transmission, but she ignored him.

She soon received her answer.

"Henri? If they had detonated the light warships at a low enough altitude to affect the middle *Lourd de Marionnettes*, it would have also damaged their transport ships, right? That is why I concluded the attack would not come from the light warships."

The Roi-Soleil took a breath.

“Middle *Lourd de Marionnette* units, can you hear me?”

The Roi-Soleil’s voice traveled via divine transmission.

“Middle *Lourd de Marionnette* units...you did well. You revealed the enemy’s main focus to be the transport ships and you also tore down the enemy’s final barrier. From here on out, the enemy will likely make a new attack, but they have nothing but the light warships to use as a shield. Meaning...”

Meaning...

“The battlefield has been established. Vassals and knights-in-training, well done paving this path in the night. I thank you for your kindness.”

Henri heard the response to the Roi-Soleil’s words over the divine transmission.

“Testament.”

“...Testament!”

“Testament. ...I lost an arm, but I can keep going!”

“Testament,” replied Henri as well.

Their morale had not dropped. So to ensure they were not picked off individually...

“Everyone back to your positions! And...”

Henri heard loud noises from three directions as she spoke.

Something had collided with the enemy forces after they split to either side.

“Oh?” There was a smile in the Roi-Soleil’s voice. “The heavy *Lourd de Marionnette* units were waiting behind the middle *Lourd de Marionnette* units? ...Was making a charge their request, Henri?”

“Testament. The middle *Lourd de Marionnette* units are falling back to regroup, so they are providing cover for that. Do you have any orders?”

“Simply that you do not forget our main goal. As long as you do that, you may



go on as much of a rampage as you like. And..." The smile in his voice was bitter now. "It seems there is one spot where the attack is developing differently."

Just as he finished speaking, the distant sound of breaking metal raced quietly through the night.

While the flames and smoke of the explosion continued to rise in the west, a middle *Lourd de Marionnette* tumbled through the air and crashed into the ground.

"That was..."

The presence that had thrown the middle *Lourd de Marionnette* stood beyond the flames and smoke. It was...

"Hachisuka's Hidamari Genbu...!"

Koroku thought to herself on the battlefield.

*...From now on, I belong here on the front line.*

This was her first time using Genbu as part of the main fighting force on a legitimate battlefield.

Before, she had secretly fought using gods of war captured from other nations or provided support from behind the scenes.

"Testament. And thanks to that, I know how much effort goes into these things."

Koroku grabbed something in her right hand, lifted it up, and threw it away.

It was a middle god of war.

It was likely 7 or 8 meters tall. Since it was specialized for defensive charges, its arms had shoulder spell launchers built in. The legs naturally leaned forward and it could use a pile bunker ability to run.

Koroku felt it was a good design for standing on one's toes. And...

*...It's pretty heavy.*

But the enemy's giant body soared high in the sky.

Something white fell down from the middle god of war floating in the night sky with its body sprawled out. It was likely the pilot. Since they did not have a fall control spell, they made a midair ejection while relying on body strengthening divine protections.

Even if they were injured in the fall, they had made the decision based on their guess as to what was about to happen to the god of war.

They guessed right.

Koroku swung her right arm to strike the falling middle god of war.

Genbu had expandable armor on the back and front, so its current form was of a turtle-like dragon standing upright.

The arm was shaped like a gauntlet with the elbow sticking out backwards. There was a hand at the end, but...

“Genbu...right arm.”

*Lernen Figurs* danced about the right arm that swung casually forward from the shoulder. They were colored black and looked something like a turtle shell. They were the Genbu’s OS program *lernen figurs*. They rippled across the arm from back to front, creating a growing shape.

“Excessive Jab...Genbu.”

It produced a strike.

Koroku realized her attack had produced instantaneous destruction.

The middle god of war hit by the Genbu’s strike was crushed from the surface of impact and flew forward while breaking apart.

The straining of metal joined together and broke apart in the night.

The mass of metal was crushed on the surface of impact and burst on the opposite surface, but it was not the Genbu’s physical strength that had done it.

Something had appeared beyond the fist at the end of the black heavy god of war’s right arm.

It was a thin disc of light.

A closer look showed that striking light was dark yet had light bursting from within. That light was the power that had struck and shattered the middle god of war.

“So that’s all it does when I use that much power for an attack.”

Koroku muttered that as the Genbu moved forward. The striking light dispersed from the end of the black heavy god of war’s right arm.

The ether light scattered like fog and distorted the surrounding scenery.

But the Genbu did not look at that slowly vanishing hammer of light.

It advanced down the slope. The enemy heavy god of war unit was up ahead. 12 silver machines ran forward with assault spears at the ready.

“Western unit, the real battle begins now.”

Koroku opened an OS *lernen figur* on her left arm and raised it while she spoke.

She did not even look at the approaching heavy gods of war. Her eyes were on Paris’s wall. The western gate was open and a giant form was exiting.

“Isaac of the Three Musketeers.”

That god of war automaton was primarily used in artillery battles.

That would be Koroku’s opponent. But first...

“Western unit, let me thank you in advance,” said Koroku while holding her left arm out toward the charging heavy god of war unit. “I am not arrogant enough to think I can handle Hexagone Française’s elites with a single god of war. So, western unit, you handle them.”

If you do that...

“I will handle the enemy’s representative.”

The heavy god of war units on the east, west, and north clashed with the enemy.

The enemy had split to either side to avoid the middle god of war units, but

they were gathering back together now.

The heavy gods of war charged straight toward them.

The enemy had regathered in front of the light warship barriers, but they were ready for this new charge.

The layout was the same as at Magdeburg.

Hashiba's tactics were to stop the charging gods of war with a closely-packed formation and buffering spells and then they would defeat the gods of war that failed to withdraw in time. However...

"We won't let you do that again!"

The heavy gods of war had devices attached to their waist hard point parts. They were attached to the back, but they opened them out to the sides.

The swing arms pulled out short-barreled quasi-anti-ship cannons. The *auspuff* vent opened and they aimed the light-recoil muzzles on the opposite end.

They fired while charging forward with captain-level acceleration.

"Fire...!"

But just before they fired, the gods of war saw the enemy's reaction.

The enemy formations activated several defense spells and buffering spells.

"Anti-artillery defenses!?" shouted one while pursing the bullet they had fired. "Sorry! This is because of our poor performance in our attack the other day."

"Don't let it get to you!" said their captain while rushing toward the expected hit point. "Your attack didn't end back there! This is just a continuation of it! No, everything from the previous generation leaving us to the end of this battle is all part of the same attack!"

"Testament!"

With those words, the wind whipped up.

In each charging god of war group, four used the flight devices on their backs to make an ascent.

But as they flew, they were fired on by the two light warships still waiting in the sky above. Sparks flew from their armor, but they took a course that avoided any direct hits and swung their wrists toward everyone below them.

“We will hold them in place from above. So...”

“Testament,” the others replied.

“It doesn’t matter who! Someone destroy that transport ship!”

*The battle is undergoing a transition*, thought Henri.

It had simply been an exchange of attack and defense before, but it was becoming much more jumbled together now.

It was difficult to get an overall view of the battlefield like this.

But Hexagone Française was pushing forward.

That was mostly thanks to the charge of the heavy *Lourd de Marionnette* units and the artillery fire. Once the enemy’s closely-packed formation crumbled, the surrounding enemy concentration could be greatly reduced even after the charge.

Also, the autonomous armor meant a lot. It was normally used for defense and it would act without instructions from the pilot to block shells and swords, but it could also be used as giant striking weapons against infantry.

After the battle at Magdeburg, they had gone as far as stopping the *Lourd de Marionnette* production line just to get that added in. The artillery system used the same technology, so it had greatly increased the overall cost of each unit.

“The anti-air equipped units are also doing quite well.”

Two light warships flew in the night sky to the west, east, and north and four *Lourd de Marionnettes* each were battling them.

Since Hexagone Française was not a naval nation, they generally did not need *Lourd de Marionnettes* that could travel between ships. They instead needed the sturdiness to defend their vast territory over long periods of time and the mobility to pull off ground battles.

When battling an enemy's aerial forces, their strategy was to draw back into their vast land to extend the battle line while they cut off the enemy's supply line and dealt with the aerial ships with anti-air fire.

But times had changed.

With the rise of P.A. Oda, the increase in population, and the national stability brought by strengthening royal authority, the trend was for nations to work toward expanding their territory.

Thus, Hexagone Française would undergo a change *here*. These were not aerial *Lourd de Marionnettes* and they had not gone through extensive flight training like pilots in Tres España or other coastal nations. But...

"If we narrow it down to assaults and ship-top battles, our knights can learn to do it for a short time."

By showing off their combat technology *here*, they could deter other nations in the future.

And this flight technology was sure to come in handy for Hexagone Française down the road. After all, if they left for the outer world, they would need to move between two ships or between ships and the ground.

And if their ground *Lourd de Marionnettes* could also perfectly fight back in ground battles, the other nations would be unable to carelessly invade.

If they could mass-produce those, then Hexagone Française would be more than a decade ahead of the other nations as the 5th generation of *Lourd de Marionnettes* arrived.

"This battle paves a path to the future for Hexagone Française."

With that, Henri reached for the battlefield information provided by the *Belle de Marionnettes* positioned around the city.

And she noticed something odd there.

*...The northern enemy formation is moving?*

*Odd*, thought Henri. The northern enemy formation led by Kiyomasa had

moved far to the east as it fell back for defense.

Even though the enemy supposedly needed to keep the transport ship behind them.

Of the two light warships in the sky, one was descending toward the surface, but the other was moving east.

...*What is this?*

Henri checked a few pieces of observation data.

She saw a large movement taking place in those real-time observations.

At the front of the northern formation, the entire Kiyomasa unit was on the move.

That ground unit was moving east, which was to the right from Henri's perspective.

Of the two light warships still in the air, one was descending and the other was moving east. None of them were waiting to see what happened.

"Are they abandoning the north and concentrating their forces to the east and west!?"

That was exactly what it was.

The observation data showed the heavy *Lourd de Marionnettes* hesitating over whether or not to pursue Kiyomasa's forces.

However, their target was not Hashiba's ground forces.

They had to target the transport ship that the enemy planned to use somehow.

But Henri raised a shout.

"Northern *Lourd de Marionnette* unit! Defend yourselves!"

Immediately, the light warships that had landed to the north exploded. That meant the one that had already landed and the one that was currently landing.

Two giant explosions blossomed below the night sky.

The sound had yet to reach Henri, but the spreading flames and shockwave

enveloped most of the attacking *Lourd de Marionnettes* and blew them away.

Kiyomasa did not look back as she ran.

But she did raise her voice.

“Defense to the rear!”

It arrived just as she said it.

The shockwave wind, the sonic impact, and the flaming materials raining down from the sky.

Those were pieces and components of the light warships.

Occasionally, a metal pillar or armor panel piece would roll past them while they ran. Also, heat filled the wind and blew between their arms and hair.

But they continued to run. Paris’s wall and moat were visible to their right.

Paris was bright.

The immense light escaping over the city walls made it feel as if something like justice resided there.

The people of that city were on the side of light. So Kiyomasa’s side...

“—————”

She hid that thought in her heart and gave a shout.

“Everyone, go on ahead! I will stop the Hexagone Française unit pursuing us!”

She opened her mouth while leading the group through the night toward Fukushima’s group to the east.

That eastern formation was visible ahead of them.

Fukushima had split her unit into three to defend against the enemy gods of war while staying on the move.

They were all desperate. So...

“If there is a light side and a dark side of this battlefield, then the enemy is the light and we are the dark. But you must not forget that, when the light side



shines, it also illuminates the dark side. We are the ones who have not forgotten about the existence of both sides and look to the light.”

So...

“We shall give the enemy darkness and give ourselves light. ...Now, go on ahead!”

With that, Kiyomasa watched the others’ movements.

Not one of them hurried onward and they lined up alongside her instead.

It was more than just one or two of them. Every member of the northern unit was there.

Even though she had told them to go on ahead.

“What are you doing!? I ordered you to go on ahead!”

She prepared for the coming fight as she shouted at them. Her critical tone should have been convincing.

But they all turned toward her with faces illuminated by Paris’s lights. They were all serious expressions with raised eyebrows. The female student in the front spoke.

“Sorry, Kiyomasa-sama. But this is a history recreation.”

“A history recreation?”

They all nodded and the female student next to her turned toward her.

“Lord Kiyomasa, whose name you have inherited, apparently said the following during the Age of the Gods: ‘Generally, the lower ranks learn from their superiors’. We have simply obeyed the Testament by doing so.”

“You mean...?”

She knew what they meant. Those under her command were following their commander’s lead.

She wondered what to do and the female student lowered her eyebrows.

“Did we make a mistake?”

“Testament, you did. That line is meant to encourage the lower ranks to obey their orders.”

They all hung their heads and groaned.

And Kiyomasa said more almost as if responding to that.

“But...I would likely have done the same thing in your place. So you were indeed learning from your superior. The mistake came from me.”

“Testament!”

They all nodded and the surviving light warship passed by overhead.

The eastern formation was visible ahead of them. Fukushima moved her trisected unit and stood on the front line to fight the gods of war.

Kiyomasa’s unit could arrive in time to attack the enemy’s flank.

*...But first we need to strike back against the remnants of the northern enemy forces.*

They had to rescue Fukushima after that.

Kiyomasa readied Caledfwlch, turned around, and raised her voice.

The number of enemies pursuing them was greatly reduced. She raised Caledfwlch toward them.

“Everyone, strike back...!”

*So Kiyomasa is joining them,* thought Koroku with a mental sigh of relief.

*...Now the battlefield is taking the general shape Takenaka expected.*

Their plan was beginning to follow the proper route. That meant Takenaka’s proposed idea was realistic.

“And if we don’t pull it off, then it’s our fault.”

She added “what a pain” from the shade below some eaves.

She was not on the battlefield. She was inside Genbu. This was the virtual cockpit she had created to perceive herself while combined with the god of war. Even though it was virtual, people generally made them look like a cockpit,

but thanks to Genbu's excellent processing power, she had constructed a more scenic location.

Of course, the movement of the outside world and control of Genbu took priority.

She did not even have to close her eyes to perceive the movements of the battlefield in addition to the scene visible around her.

But Genbu's processing power showed it all to her in slow motion. It was not at the level of an automaton, but her senses perceived the outside world with the speed compressed several hundred times.

*...It would be exhausting if it was always like this.*

That was why she stayed in here during that time. It was always daytime with a sunny sky. She did not know what the temperature was because she could not establish that level of detail. She wondered if a new program could add that functionality.

"Ah."

Her right arm had just sent an enemy god of war flying.

That was thanks to the efforts of the M.H.R.R. students down below. A dozen or so attacked the enemy god of war's shins.

"Rock Faust!!"

All they did was hit it with the rocks unearthed by the previous crust bombing.

But it was a decent effort. The slope was poor footing for the enemy, so they could not move if they shut off their senses. Those attacks had smashed through the armor panels on the shins and it would have done as much damage as an equivalent attack on a human. Would the next generation gods of war prevent that by automatically shutting off their senses?

Koroku suddenly found a plate of watermelon on the bench below the eaves.

It was meaningless. It would have no flavor even if she ate it. It was the same as the background data.

But she was glad it was there.

She lightly raised Genbu's left hand as a sign of thanks to everyone who had made such an effort below.

"There."

And she placed her hand on the enemy spear sent her way from the left.

The enemy was moving well. The charge had essentially been a surprise attack, but they properly twisted their spears forward to increase the penetrative power.

"I can see you."

She aimed a short cannon toward the enemy's waist.

She targeted the enemy that attempted to hide below the spear aimed at her.

It was a good combination attack. The god of war pilot had probably come up with it themselves. However...

"I can see you."

Koroku had placed her hand on the spear. She made a forceful twist to repel the assault spear and her fingers touched the spear tip. And Koroku stood up below the summer sun.

There was a field beyond the plaza-like garden ahead of her. She directed her gaze there.

"————"

And she shut her eyes.

The Hexagone Française god of war unit saw something baffling on the battlefield.

After charging at the Hashiba god of war, one of their own gods of war suddenly transformed.

Twisting and rotating the outthrust spear had been necessary ever since Magdeburg. It increased the force of the attack, but it also prevented the

enemy from grabbing or pushing back the spear tip.

Also, the pilot who had made the attack on the Genbu was an expert gunner. They excelled at firing an unseen blast along with their standard attack.

But this transformation stopped all of that.

It happened in an instant.

The god of war's right arm twisted inward several times and ended up like a wrung cloth.

The spear held below the arm was at the center of the twisting.

The spear too bent deeply and seemed to wrap around itself before striking the god of war's body along with the arm.

Two movements immediately followed.

The first was the pilot making an emergency ejection from the god of war's back.

The second was the pilotless god of war's body spinning.

The pilot's arm was broken from elbow to shoulder. Even though Hexagone Française safety devices were on the fourth generation and they ejected the pilot as soon as possible to ensure their safety.

The god of war was twisted. As if the spiraling of the spear and arm was propagating through the rest of it, its body ducked below the arm and spear.

“————”

With a scream of tearing steel, the god of war's body made a full rotation.

The ultra-heavy god of war bounced up as if its bent back had snapped back.

And the Genbu struck it.

In the instant of destruction and crushing created by a bright attack, the Genbu clearly spoke.

“Now, come.”

The first to notice was Katagiri who was looking up into the sky.

He saw two silhouettes in the sky to the east and west.

One was the light warship which had gone ahead of Kiyomasa into the eastern sky.

The other was a light warship from Hachisuka's unit.

Several figures could be seen lined up on their decks. They were...

"Charging Company – Schau Essen!"

They threw themselves into the night sky with perfectly natural movements.

They threw their bodies straight into empty air like they were jumping onto their beds.

They did not spread out their arms and they did not flail their legs. It was as if to say a relaxed pose was best. However...

"Klassisch Kunst: Weight of Life...activate."

Weight spells manifested the weight of their lives.

Their destructive power came from equating their physical volume with the quantity of their life.

Their movements awaited the falling process. They positioned their heads downward, controlled their attitude, and thrust their arms down.

"Listen, Landsknechts! Have you eaten!?"

"We have!"

"Like pigs!?"

"They've got nothin' on us!"

"Well said," laughed their captain. And, "We are those with a greater quantity of life than your average person!"

"We are those with a greater quantity of life than your average person!!"

"We are those who use that life to fulfill our duty!"

"We are those who use that life to fulfill our duty!"

He breathed in.

“So let us shout and eat our duty: Schau Essen!”

“Testament! Schau Essen!”

They shouted as they fell. They picked up speed, transformed themselves into weighty hammers, and sang.

“In the lovely Westerwald.”

It was an ode to the beautiful mountains of northern M.H.R.R.

“Over your heights the wind whistles so cold.”

They continued on.

“However, the smallest sunshine.”

They fell straight down.

“Thrusts deep into the heart!”

And a tremor ran through the depths of the night.

The battlefield was literally struck.

M.H.R.R.’s ground unit had used their bodies to provide aerial support.

They did not care if the god of war unit crushed them or blew them away.

“Don’t moooooooooooooove!!”

They slammed their bodies against the enemy, crashed into the defense barriers, and stopped them.

As a result, they scored direct hits on 7 of the 18 heavy gods of war active on the east and west and 4 more were struck by semi-direct hits.

The sounds of impact had been heard far too often this night.

But there were two new noises this time.

“Yes...!”

One was the Hashiba forces cheering for some actual progress on their part.

“Damn you...!”

The other was the middle god of war unit who had been forced to fall back after the explosion of the breakwaters.

Hexagone Française’s main force had gathered to the east and west.

Meanwhile, something gathered in the eastern, western, and southern sky.

“What is that...!?”

The transport ships landed there were giving off light. Ether light extended outward from fairly high above the sides of the ships like horizontally spread wings.

That light produced a spell product that everyone was familiar with.

“A virtual ocean...!”

“So that’s it!”

Henri shouted while running along the passageway from the northern wall to the eastern wall.

She finally understood the “flooding” the enemy had in mind.

Hashiba had prepared some insurance in case they found flooding Paris would not be possible.

“They intend to expand the virtual ocean of an aerial ship over an extremely wide area so that it surrounds Paris and effectively ‘floods’ it!”

That would require some interpretation, but it was plausible. After all, aerial ships could use a virtual ocean to ascend because submerging the ship in the virtual ocean supplied buoyancy. So...

*...Is it too late to send forces to the southern transport ship!?*

“Everyone, destroy the enemy transport ships on the east and west! That supersedes all other orders!”

Fukushima stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Kiyomasa.



They were in a defensive formation.

Outside that, the enemy had sent their middle god of war unit to the front in preparation for another clash.

But they too were preparing for a clash.

After crashing down from the sky, Schau Essen moved to the front of the Hashiba forces. They had already prepared their spells and the corners of their mouths were lifted in smiles.

“Let’s see who has more to them: us or those gods of war,” they said. “So you take care of any enemies that are too much for us.”

“Testament. I will stubbornly do exactly that. ...This is the perfect chance to test myself.”

An ocean spread out overhead.

“It should take about 30 minutes for this to envelop Paris from the east, west, and south,” said Fukushima.

“So we need to see whether or not we can change history in that 30 minutes, right?” said Kiyomasa.

That did not seem to hit home with anyone, but Fukushima smiled.

“I am sure this will be an incredible thing.”

When everyone saw the look on Fukushima’s face, they altered their own expressions.

They all smiled with slightly raised eyebrows.

“Testament!”

Essentially, this meant there were 30 minutes left. So until then...

“Everyone, prepare to resist. Kiyomasa-dono and I will...”

“Testament. We will break through the enemy’s front line and head to Paris.”

Fukushima looked out ahead and saw three figures atop Paris’s wall.

The first was Sanada’s Miyoshi Seikai.

The second was Henri of the Three Musketeers.

And the third...

“ ‘Flying Katou’ Katou Danzou.”

The three of them vanished from the wall.

They had jumped down. And they were on their way here.

“Wow,” everyone said. “They’ve sent in three officer-class fighters?”

“That means we have reached the final stage of this battle,” said Fukushima. “The Roi-Soleil will defend Paris while they use all their might to put a stop to the Siege of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle. Thus...”

The three figures slowly walked toward them while lit up by Paris’s lights.

“They are now the attackers and we the defenders. The two of us will handle those three, so everyone else defend this location.”

With that, Fukushima stepped forward. She smiled with her eyebrows raised and held a hand out toward Kiyomasa.

“I shall accompany thee partway there, Kiyo-dono.”

# Chapter 64: Impeacher Along the Trajectory

## 第六十四章

### 『軌道上の弾劾者』



ああもう  
どうでもいいと  
そう思えたら  
どうでもいいのに  
配点 (思い出)

*Oh, honestly*

*It doesn't matter*

*If you think*

*It doesn't matter*

### **Point Allocation (Memory)**

A battle had begun below the night sky.

It was fought in three directions: east, west, and south.

To east and west, Hexagone Français's god of war units clashed with the Hashiba warriors who were preceded by an aerial bombardment and a charging unit. To south, the warriors of both sides clashed head-on.

The Hashiba charging unit applied their Weight of Life divine protection to all their warriors. That allowed 2 platoons to fight back against a single enemy middle god of war.

The Hashiba forces fought back against the heavy god of war units using the aerial bombardment, but the enemy attack was still wearing down their ground units. The highly-mobile heavy gods of war had begun striking the Hashiba warriors from the side.

The light warships acting as barriers for the transport ships were being hit and becoming no more than walls.

Cannon fire, god of war movement, clashing metal, and wind rang loud. And amid it all...

"How much longer!?"

"It's only been 3 minutes! That's just a tenth of the time!"

"But keep at it!" someone shouted. "The enemy officers can't get here! The commanders are stopping them! So we're only up against ordinary students! We're the same, so what good are we if we can't hold them back!"

Everyone agreed and fought against the god of war clash using defense barriers strengthened by divine protections.

“I wish the commanders would get back soon...!”

“You idiot! They left this with us! And...can’t you hear that!?”

A sound shook the air as if in response.

Loud and heavy noises rang out from much closer to Paris.

Fukushima and the others were stopping and fighting back against the approaching enemy officers.

Koroku was engaged in combat with Isaac of the Three Musketeers.

He was a god of war automaton specialized for artillery. And he was a large unit at about 30m tall.

Koroku had thought she would gain an advantage if she approached while he fired from long range, but...

*...He’s fast.*

He looked hulk-like with feet solidly planted on the ground, but he could move around quite quickly.

That was thanks to the fin-shaped multi-legs on the bottom of his feet. He seemed to crawl like a bug and the fin shape allowed him to cross the wasteland and any bumps or dips with smooth, flowing motions.

“This isn’t good.”

Isaac used a wide area of the battlefield and he fought much like an aerial ship, albeit on a flat surface.

Genbu was designed for defense. Its gravity-based attacks were all for close-range use and poorly suited for a moving opponent. Also, the figure riding on Isaac’s shoulder was in the way. That figure was...

“Armand of the Three Musketeers!”

“Hm, so they know who I am too.”

“Only natural,” replied Isaac.

“Is that so?” Armand swung his right arm. “Now, then.”

His power was wide-range gravitational control.

He could tear up the crust and use it as a wall to prevent the enemy’s approach. It was also crucial for dodging. His power could hide Isaac’s initial movement from the enemy.

He and Isaac had been working together this whole time.

They still were. Armand would raise an earthen wall and the enemy would have to choose either left or right. They would use that moment to take their next action and get a step ahead of their opponent.

Their weapons were the secondary cannons on Isaac’s legs and waist.

He continually fired quasi-anti-ship class and anti-god-of-war class secondary cannons.

Meanwhile, the Genbu had excellent defenses. Not only did it have plenty of armor, but it could use a system known as Excessive Jab to create gravity barrier shields.

*...From what I’ve seen, those can deflect and strike down Isaac’s secondary cannon blasts.*

But the ability to defend was not the same as the ability to fight.

“They’re gonna have a hard time against us. Don’t you think, Isaac?”

“Affirmative.”

With that word, Isaac raised his left arm. That was one of his main cannons, but he did not aim it at the Genbu.

“Target: enemy light warship. Fire.”

Koroku reacted to the enemy’s movement.

It happened just as she prepared to sit on the bench below the eaves in the virtual cockpit.

“Light warship, raise your defense barriers to the south! You’re being fired

on!”

Isaac fired the main cannon built into his arm.

That left arm rivaled a warship’s main cannon.

*...He can shoot it while moving?*

He must have been able to instantly calculate out the effects of inertia and momentum on the shell.

That was probably because the gunner was an automaton and his body was the cannon.

The surface of the crust was blown away in front of him as the force raced out.

Isaac’s entire body floated up a bit.

And noise struck the entire area.

All the dust and dirt that got on Isaac’s armor during combat was instantaneously blown away.

Immediately, the shell flew along a rising curve.

Genbu’s rear vision saw the light warship open as many layers of defense barrier as possible and adjust the angle.

“...!”

The shell was deflected upwards. And the shockwave raced out along its path and shook Genbu.

Koroku had screwed up.

She needed to do some serious soul-searching about this. She would always say whatever she wanted to say, but that was what led people to treat her like a child. However...

*...I can’t leave this to the light warship.*

If Isaac moved side to side with his feet, the light warship would be unable to respond in time.

Koroku could not let herself be shot either, so she had to move forward.



However...

“...!?”

An earthen wall appeared right in front of her.

...*Dammit.*

She had to dodge to the left or right.

But a presence approached before she could do that.

The stillness preceding a great power ruled the atmosphere like an alarm.

She knew what had happened. The right main cannon, the opposite of the previous one, had been fired at her.

Isaac blew away the dirt with an explosive blast and saw Armand's earthen wall shatter as well.

He had fired his main cannon while moving. His right half floated up a bit.

...*Attitude control.*

If possible, Isaac wanted to repeat *this*.

He would master a single function as a machine.

So he wanted to become a machine that only fired artillery.

But that was a machine's selfishness.

Perhaps as a kindness to that selfishness, Armand was accompanying him this time and the *Belle de Marionnettes* were constantly sending him lots of ranging data from Paris's walls.

They were assisting his defense and confirming the enemy's location. He only needed to move and fire. He could not enjoy the feeling of being a stationary turret, but he appreciated being able to accomplish something with just his own ability.

And right now, he used the recoil to fall back while staring through the explosion of dirt.

Due to his size, he did not need to fear using passive sight devices when

searching for the enemy.

The airborne dirt and rocks filled the space before his eyes like a low-resolution fog.

“Isaac!” shouted Armand.

Isaac’s shell should have scored a direct hit on the enemy.

He had heard the sound of bursting armor from the direction the shell had flown. And he had heard it more than once.

That meant the shell impact had caused all of the Genbu’s armor to burst.

At most, only the enemy’s lower half would remain. So...

“Isaac! Back and to the left!”

Isaac responded to Armand’s voice by focusing on his left sight devices. And behind him...

“————”

He saw the Genbu.

*Unclear*, thought Isaac as he spun around and kept his distance from the Genbu’s approach.

It was unclear.

He did not know when the Genbu had moved behind him or how it had moved.

Besides, his senses had failed to detect any sound of an approach. Also...

*...Audible hit.*

Why had he heard the sound of multiple pieces of armor bursting?

His thoughts led him to just one conclusion:

“Multi-layer movable armor.”

“You think so too, huh?”

Hexagone Française’s heavy *Lourd de Marionnettes* had autonomous armor

equipped at their waist and shoulders.

Was the Genbu using that for all its armor?

That would explain what the enemy had done. The impact of his main cannon had been propagated to other armor like a wave and ultimately driven into the ground.

But once you knew the trick, there were ways around it.

“Autonomous armor reacts to an initial attack,” said Armand. “So you just have to start by firing a secondary cannon at it and then fire a main cannon while the armor is dealing with the first one. Or just get real close before firing.”

“Affirmative.”

But the enemy had another defense: a shield made from a thick gravity barrier.

It had used that the day before yesterday. When Bernard had attacked the approaching transport ship as a swarm of small dragons, that had to be the technique used to fully deflect the dragon cannon.

Depending on the output and accuracy, the initial secondary cannon shot might not work.

In that case...

“Well, it’ll work out. We know what we need to do to win...so the rest is figuring out how to do it.”

Isaac agreed while switching from attitude control to a sprint.

He took aim at the Genbu while constantly moving and firing his secondary cannons.

“Kh...”

Koroku clenched her teeth inside the Genbu.

*...There’s a lag before the armor can recover after opening.*

Jumping forward when avoiding the previous main cannon blast had been a

mistake.

She had been unable to immediately move and he had gotten away.

It hurt that she had revealed a lot of what she could do, but on the other hand...

*...There is still a good side to it.*

After all, Isaac was aiming at only her now.

That was a good thing for the others behind her. So as an individual...

“Don’t run away, me.”

Isaac was keeping a set distance and firing secondary cannons.

Of course, that was not enough to break the Genbu’s armor. The multi-layer armor would shift position when hit and the rest of the armor would work in unison to let the force of the impact escape. She also used some gravitational control buffering, so an anti-god of war shell could only shake her but not damage her, assuming it was not used as a counterattack.

Besides, she knew what the enemy was trying to do.

“He clearly plans to fire a main cannon after the secondary cannon.”

When Hashiba had given Koroku the Genbu, she had told her to “be on the lookout” for that. Thinking back, that seemed awfully casual, but that was just how that superior officer was.

And it felt wrong to have an enemy going for that in her very first battle using the Genbu.

*...On divine TV shows, those weaknesses aren’t exploited until the middle of the season.*

Perhaps this meant reality was not so kind.

Koroku was currently seated on the bench in the virtual cockpit.

She had a hand on her chin while she dealt with reality, but she liked to be rebellious enough to wear a white dress in here.

“Hm...”

She moved the Genbu around while thinking. She took a circular path that pursued Isaac who was moving around in a circle. However, she ran in zig-zags and if possible...

“Reach him.”

Her outstretched hand was 10 meters short. But she thought to herself while making a few circuits and deflecting shells.

*...This should do.*

She would change the current situation. It was a boring method, but she would go for it. And...

“Now, then.”

She viewed the scene in front of her.

Beyond the virtual space’s garden, she saw a vast field and a path cutting through it. There were cart tracks along the path and no summer grass grew there. She walked right up to it.

“I’m not sure if I’m allowed to call this nostalgic.”

She tilted her head a bit and closed her eyes.

“That’s enough. ...Let’s go, Genbu.”

Armand visually tracked the enemy’s movement.

The Genbu suddenly stopped pursuing them.

*...It stopped!?*

No, that would only make it a target. That meant the enemy must be...

“Isaac! It’s taking a shortcut!”

Instead of pursuing them along the circular path, it would cut them off by taking an arc through the circle.

The Genbu did indeed begin running. Its right side was turned toward them. They could see it on their left. Like that, the Genbu leaned forward with both arms lowered. With the tail-like ballast raised behind it, it looked like a two-

legged dragon.

But cutting along that arc would slightly distance it from them.

They had the advantage in long-range combat. Moving away from them only worked against the enemy.

So that was what they would do.

Isaac spun his upper body around. The enemy was running alongside them and preparing to pass them, but...

“Lock.”

Armand’s rotating vision shook just once. There were ballast anchors at the end and middle of the cannon barrels and those controlled the bending caused by the shaking and also fixed the barrels in place.

Then Isaac fired secondary cannons toward the enemy trying to get ahead of them.

They pierced the air.

The secondary cannons pursued the Genbu starting from the lightest one.

Sparks flew and the Genbu’s right shoulder armor shook.

But then Isaac moved away.

Continuing along the circular path would only bring him to the point the enemy was headed, so he instead took a path that gave the Genbu’s destination a wide berth.

Armand assisted Isaac’s movements while he was shaken by an inertial force in the opposite direction of before.

While the Genbu approached the original circular path once more...

“...!”

He raised several earthen walls in front of it.

That blocked the Genbu’s vision, so it would be unable to see them.

“Isaac! If you fire from straight ahead, you’ll hit it dead center!”

“Understood...!”

They had gotten themselves where they needed to be.

Isaac spun his body around while piercing the center of the earthen walls. First with a secondary cannon. And then...

“The main cannon!”

With a deafening roar, he fired the right main cannon.

It was such a powerful blast that the cannon seemed to float up from Isaac’s side.

Instead of shaking, it swung backwards. And just as the barrel slid backwards to reduce the recoil, an explosive blast pushed the shell forward and launched it.

The straight line of destructive force followed the path of the secondary cannon.

It arrived at the earthen walls which had a hole in the center thanks to the secondary cannon shell.

The main cannon shell arrived as if to bore a hole.

And it punched through.

*...Talk about accurate!*

*That’s just like Isaac, thought Armand. Henri would say it was too accurate and question the nature of Belle de Marionnettes.*

Armand did not care either way. He thought accuracy was great and inaccuracy was very human.

And this was Isaac’s time. Accuracy was apparently a wonderful thing. But...

“...!?”

Armand suddenly thought the world had shifted.

Isaac had moved to the right without warning.

His sight devices failed to keep up with the rapid movement and his brain’s comprehension of what he was seeing had been distorted. He made some

adjustments to his noisy vision and raised his voice.

“What is it!?”

But there was no response from Isaac who was still moving forcefully to the right.

Something else acted as a response.

It arrived from dead ahead.

“...Huh!?”

It was Isaac’s main cannon.

The enemy had bounced it back at them with a reflective defense. And based on the timing...

“Was it going for this from the beginning!?”

The Genbu was there beyond the obliterated earthen walls. Its arms were raised and thick ether light fragments were scattering around it.

Just as the shattering sound reached Armand, the shockwave of the ricocheted main cannon hit quite close to Isaac.

*...I missed!*

Koroku clenched her teeth at that instead of celebrating the successful deflection.

One of Koroku’s tactics was to accurately deflect Isaac’s main cannon for a reverse direct hit.

The earthen walls in front of her had been a stroke of luck. The secondary cannon hole through them had accurately shown her the trajectory the main cannon would take.

So she had let the secondary cannon hit her and prepared herself.

In the end, the Genbu’s defense barrier had deflected Isaac’s main cannon. However...

“He dodged, huh?”



The enemy had seen her reflection defense now, so she could not expect it to go better next time.

*In that case, she thought.*

*...I need to think up another plan!*

A concern reached her. The two great pressures of the direct hit and reflection hit the Genbu from the front.

Isaac moved forward.

He had seen the Genbu knocked backwards by the double shockwaves.

That black god of war's reflection defense could probably deflect any attack depending on the power, but it could not fully eliminate the secondary effects.

The shockwaves created by the hit and reflection had just hit the Genbu.

Of course, Isaac had also been hit by the secondary effects of the reflected shell flying past him.

The main cannon caused a lot of shaking.

But Isaac saw that the Genbu's armor was greatly shifted to the back after landing again.

The autonomous armor had buffered against the shockwaves.

He could finish it off with a main cannon right now. However...

*...Shaking!*

His entire body was shaking.

That was an unnecessary element for a machine. It only got in the way of the simple task of shooting.

But he had to shoot right now.

Now was the time to shoot even if he was shaking and not in the optimal stance.

“—————”

*Strange*, thought Isaac concerning that.

It was strange.

Isaac was always thinking that he wanted to be a simple machine.

Thus, he thought he did not need anything that was not needed to shoot.

But all sorts of things were being sent his way to prevent him from shooting.

So why was he so aware that this was the time *when he needed to shoot*?

“Duty...!”

Isaac saw that four-letter word as a necessity.

It was not a function.

It was a necessity.

Was there any way to ignore the shaking and everything else so he could keep going?

There was. Namely...

“Approach!”

Isaac had sent himself to the right in order to dodge, but now he swung his body forward.

He used all his strength to aim his right main cannon toward the Genbu.

He focused all his movement on his right side. The multi-legs on the sole kicked his right leg forward and his left leg backwards to send him forwards with his right side turned forward. That directed his body’s shaking forward.

“Fire...!”

That was the moment to shoot.

But Isaac realized his vision was shaking.

*...Footing!?*

His right foot’s location was the problem.

The multi-legs under his right foot slipped and his right leg slid to the right.

He saw what had happened as his vision tilted left at high speed.

A great pressure had packed down the ground there.

*...Did the Genbu set that up!?*

Armand checked the ground below Isaac's feet while working his high-speed thoughts.

Isaac's weight had caused the ground to crumble, but the angular marks the multi-legs had left in the crumbled ground showed it had been solid in the instant he stepped there.

That was proof the ground had been packed down.

The Genbu had likely done it while moving in that arc. It had followed the same arc several times while making meaningless attacks.

*...What if all of that was only meant to intentionally pack down the ground here?*

The answer was obvious: the enemy had guided them here even if that meant being targeted by a main cannon.

The initial response had been reflecting the main cannon. And if disrupting their stance here was the next response...

"Isaac! This is the enemy's second attack!"

Blatantly using the explosive blast to fall back had likely been part of the trap.

It had been bait to get them to move forward. If so...

"The enemy is coming!"

The black god of war approached through the vortex of explosive wind and the scattering summer grass.

The Genbu raised its right arm and charged in toward Isaac's left side since that main cannon was still being adjusted and could not be used.

There was not enough time to turn to the left. The secondary cannons fired repeatedly at close range, but...

*...Will that not be enough to strip away that multi-layer armor!?*

Just as Armand wondered that, he saw Isaac's response.

Isaac swung his non-functioning left main cannon at the Genbu.

A few different decisions intersected.

The Genbu had not dodged the left main cannon swung horizontally at it by Isaac.

Instead, it had swung its left arm up from below.

Immediately afterwards, Isaac's left main cannon transformed.

The exterior was twisted like it was being wrung and it shattered.

That transformation instantly raced up to the shoulder and the armor burst starting from the other end.

The sound was a lot like spray falling into a body of water.

The barrel bent and swelled outward. The transformation caused it to intensely hop upwards. But he pulled his arm back to the left.

"Execute release!"

Isaac's left main cannon detached from the shoulder.

It had not been destroyed. He had purged it himself.

The Genbu appeared to be using its left arm to swing up the spiraling main cannon.

That main cannon was only an impediment to the Genbu, so it tried to throw it backwards.

"...!?"

But it could not. The main cannon heavily weighed down on the Genbu.

That was thanks to Armand.

His companion's arm was only a component now, so he had used his gravitational control to increase its weight. And...

“Isaac!”

Isaac rotated his upper body.

He used the outward twisting of his left arm to spin his right arm inwards.

He aimed that right main cannon at the Genbu while it was held in place by the destroyed main cannon.

A secondary cannon hit first.

The multi-layer armor was already out of place in some areas and a large wave ran through it this time.

Isaac aimed his right main cannon there.

He targeted the center of the enemy’s chest at just about point-blank range.

And in that position, he made an announcement.

“Fire.”

He did so.

*...Not good.*

Koroku thought in that instant.

How was she supposed to get out of this one? She had an idea, but...

“I guess that won’t work.”

No matter what she did, returning alive was not going to be easy. But she had never had too much of an attachment to life, so...

*...I guess this is fine.*

She also decided to get a good view of the scenery in her final moments.

She was currently inside the virtual cockpit.

There was a garden, fields beyond that, and a path through the field.

She stood on the path, but where was she to go now?

*...What’s programmed beyond here?*

*This is complete escapism*, she thought with a bitter smile.

She turned toward the rows of fields and cast her gaze beyond them.

“———”

She saw someone there.

They were smaller than she was and they sat on the bank of a stream with their back to her.

*...Is that...?*

Just as she thought that, she felt her vision grow dark.

She feared her life had truly ended, but it soon cleared up.

There was a straw hat on her head. And...

“They’re gone.”

The person she had seen had disappeared.

After confirming they were nowhere to be seen, she took a breath.

“Where can I meet you?”

And...

“It isn’t over until I do.”

Koroku opened her eyes.

Inside the god of war, her high-speed thoughts were still functioning.

She was pinned down from above while exposed to a main cannon blast. So...

“Ahh, this is so lame...!”

She stopped worrying about appearances.

She actually let the main cannon wreckage crush her from above.

An explosion hit the main cannon wreckage.

Bursting air consumed Isaac’s left leg and right main cannon while also

striking the Genbu's lowered back.

"...!"

And everything within a 50 meter radius was hit and crushed by a shockwave.

Armand endured the force of Isaac's landing.

Isaac had floated up several meters and been blown away.

He had been right to not worry too much about his left leg.

With the armor panels crushed in and the multi-legs embedded into it, the left leg was nothing more than dead weight.

Of course, that dead weight could be used as a shield, but...

"...Oh!!"

Isaac collided with the ground on the left and then right. The impact was enough for the central waist area to bottom and strike the ground once.

While riding on his shoulder, Armand saw the damage to the right side of Isaac's face. He reached for Isaac's head and turned it to face the enemy.

Then dirt and metal shrapnel poured down.

The ground torn up by the explosive blast and the broken main cannon components and armor were falling back down. It was too heavy to be called rain and produced a great cacophony, but Armand kept his eyes on the enemy.

The Genbu was there, but it had changed form.

"A woman...?"

Armand saw the Genbu drop all its armor down to fully negate the impact.

The armor removal stopped at the waist. The collection of arches made by the many armor panels looked like a skirt. And a figure extended up from that upside-down flower of blossoming armor.

*...Is that the Genbu's true form?*

The frame was worn by a feminine inner shell.

It looked like a slender woman wearing a black dress. The face visible below the Genbus' head armor was shaped with a thin smile below the nose.

And the Genbu moved.

Both its arms were broken. Most likely, it had "reflected" the explosive blast when Isaac had fired his main cannon. Both arms' armor had shattered to reveal a slenderness that matched the newly revealed body.

But the Genbu brought its hands to its head.

It did not grab an armor panel. The act was much like placing something on one's head. Perhaps a wide-brimmed hat.

After appearing to fix such a hat, the Genbu lowered both arms.

Immediately all of its armor was adjusted. With overlapping metallic sounds, it regained its original form. However...

"I endured it. And it looks like you can't move."

There was exhaustion in the voice Armand heard. But she was right, so he nodded once and replied.

"You are surprisingly mature. I am glad I saw that."

The Genbu gave her immobilized opponents a definite nod and turned her back.

She began to run toward her next battlefield.

All that remained were the rumbling of the running god of war and the sound of waves much like what one would hear at the beach.

Armand looked up into the night sky and spoke.

"So it isn't over yet. I wonder what the others are doing right now."

On the road in front of Paris, someone had fallen to their knees.

This figure who still appeared large even on their knees was Seikai.

Ether light surrounded his arms as he pressed his hands against the ground



and shook his head.

Someone was walking to his left and he looked up at them.

“Fukushima Masanori...”

But he did not get the full name out.

That was because he coughed a large quantity of blood from his mouth and onto the dry dirt ground.

He had suffered a blow worthy of being called fatal.

He had engaged Fukushima in combat and this was the result of the very first attack.

“Miyoshi-dono.”

Fukushima looked ahead to the wall and light of Paris as she spoke.

She viewed a former opponent, an enemy she had been no match for: Katou Danzou.

“Thou should receive medical treatment as soon as possible. Our connection to thy group is not a shallow one. At the very least, this is not where thy life should end.”

But Seikai did not nod. Danzou raised his voice as if in response.

“Seikai! ...Do you really think you’re important enough to bring me trouble!?”

“No...!”

Seikai produced a bloody voice and stood up, albeit unsteadily.

And he took a deep breath.

If he breathed out, blood would spill with it, so he breathed in and stopped.

He could move as much as the lung capacity of a demonic long-lived allowed. So after gathering his strength like that...

“———!”

Seikai launched an attack on Fukushima’s back.

Seikai realized he was no match for her.

*...When did she reach this level...!?*

She was nothing like the other day.

Even during the battle in that waterway, he would have been no match for her in a proper duel. But the battlefield was a factor and a ninja would use that in every way possible. They had not been dueling in a ring.

So he had thought this would be the same.

He thought back to when he had approached her just now.

*...I was...*

Careless.

Earlier, Seikai had charged at Fukushima.

They were east of Paris and there were wheel tracks in the road, so he had rushed straight in and fired his Sermon Cannon. And he used the 3-way version.

He had not wanted to hold back and had gone all out from the very beginning. Or he had meant to.

If his preemptive strike had been successful, Danzou could have taken care of the rest. He had hoped an unworthy student like him could at least support his teacher.

That was why he had gone straight in.

If his opponent had dodged, he could have circled around her with even greater movements.

There was a trick to that: the wheel tracks in the road.

The slopes created by wheels made for good footholds when moving left or right.

That was all it was, but knowing how to move around the battlefield meant a lot. Especially when his opponent had never been near Paris before. He had already checked over the possible battlefields the day before, so he was more

familiar with it. However...

“—————”

Fukushima had dodged his Sermon Cannon to the right.

It had looked like she only lightly swayed her body, but that was inaccurate.

Fukushima had slipped through the gaps between the rapid-fire ether bullets.

*Impossible*, Seikai had thought.

But she had gotten through the bullets as if simply walking.

Meanwhile, he had moved too far to her right. So he had swung his right hand while jumping. He had made a leap to circle around to Fukushima's left.

“Seikai!”

That was when he had heard Danzou's voice.

He had wondered what that was about and that was precisely when the attack had come from dead ahead.

It had been Ichinotani.

*...How!?*

Fukushima had been passing him by, so why had the attack come from in front of him?

Only then had he noticed she had let go of Ichinotani.

And she had placed the butt end against one of the wheel track slopes at an angle that would pierce his gut.

His gaze had followed Fukushima, so he had not seen Ichinotani stab into him like a pike.

No, it was not that he had not seen it. He could not see it because it was hidden behind his right arm's Sermon Cannon.

*...This is...*

It had been almost the opposite of what he had done in the waterway the other day.

Then, he had made a feint shot hidden behind an arm.

This time, she had done it.

His leaping motion had shifted him from Ichinotani, but...

“—————”

He had not lasted. He had tried to keep his legs firm, but Ichinotani had escaped his movement and spun through the air.

“So thou have returned.”

He had seen it fall right into Fukushima’s hand while she kept her back turned.

*...Oh.*

*What have I done?* he had thought.

*I have undoubtedly helped this monster grow.*

“...!”

Seikai activated ether bullets on both his arms.

If he could not reach her and she would dodge, he would have to drag her into it.

He took the Internal Blessings of a demonic long-lived, solidified them in his hands, and ran.

He jumped from the wheel track slopes to accelerate as if running up the road.

*...Here I go!*

There was Fukushima’s back in front of Paris. Her ponytail was blowing in the battlefield wind.

*...How poetic!*

With that thought, he moved his arms as if to embrace her from behind and clasp his hands together.

If he had the ether bullets collide, they would burst and trigger an explosion. Even with her acceleration spell, he could not see how Fukushima could escape the blast.

For an instant, Seikai thought of his companion's faces.

*...Everyone...!*

But no matter how much he tried to remember, nothing appeared in his mind's eye.

He was focused on the moment right now. He had no time for his companions. And he wondered if they had accepted him specifically because he was so heartless.

A moment later, he did not so much stop as he did throw himself forward to embrace her. And...

"Seikai-dono."

He realized the scent of flowers had reached his chest.

It was Fukushima.

She took a light step into his closing arms.

*...What!?*

Seikai came to a stop without thinking.

He realized an impact had hit both his arms.

It was not that the ether bullets had come together and exploded. A horizontal rod had entered between the inside of his elbows.

It was Ichinotani.

The blade end pierced the inside of his left elbow and the butt end shattered the inside of his right elbow.

Her first attack had also harnessed his demonic strength so he would self-destruct.

"Kh," he groaned while Fukushima's voice reached him.

“Seikai-dono, how about we put it like this?”

This being...

“Thy mistake was not being more thorough in thy initial attacks.”

In an instant, Fukushima grabbed Ichinotani from between his arms.

*...Oh.*

The floral scent was on the move.

It was the scent of her hair.

She opened Ichinotani, slammed the blade against the ether bullets in his hands, and absorbed them.

“Here I come.”

She had turned around in his arms.

That put her at extreme close range, so he responded.

*...Ohh!!*

His elbow was shattered, his Blessing ether bullets had been taken, and he had received a fatal blow to the core of his body.

What more could she take from him?

*...If a battlefield blossom would steal anything, would it be your heart? Or...*

Seikai sent his entire body forward. He swung his arms, head, and everything else down to strike Fukushima.

“———!?”

He saw a light below him.

It was a blade. Fukushima’s Ichinotani was standing up from the ground with the blade open.

*...When did she do that!?*

He knew. She had done it in the timing you could call the instant of attack.

She could slip an attack into the gap between attack and defense.

*She is dangerous,* thought Seikai. But he also realized the meaning of the light

being fired from below.

He had poured all of his Blessings into those ether bullets and they were now being fired as a cannon. And it would not hit his jaw or face.

It would hit his demonic horn.

“...!”

A powerful impact knocked his forehead upwards.

The ether light scattered, the impact tilted his head up, and the horn on his forehead broke with a solid sound.

Seikai found his vision wavering. The blow to his horn had shaken his brain.

His vision was going dark as he lost consciousness.

But he understood one thing: he had tried to pick that battlefield blossom and instead had his “demonicness” broken.

*...Teacher, I am sorry.*

He thought while falling to his knees and collapsing.

*It seems I am still no more than a lover of literature.*

Fukushima took a breath after Seikai collapsed and shut his eyes.

She decided against having any thoughts about this enemy.

Seikai had made his decision when he came here.

“Honestly...”

Only now did she come to understand many things.

She muttered to herself while thinking back to her defeat and the path she had walked afterwards.

“If I had understood this earlier, this would have been a very different story.”

She did not feel apologetic. What she had done had been the best option for who they had been back then.

That would never happen again.

And from here on, she could only count on the future.

So she turned to face Paris.

“Katou Danzou-sama.”

“Giving me the ‘-sama’ treatment, are we?”

“Because thou are at a position higher than me.”

However...

“I must reach a position even higher than thee.”

“And what position is that?”

“The Peerless in the East.”

Hearing that, Danzou’s expression changed while backlit by Paris.

“Ha...!”

He laughed. Flying Katou puffed out his small body and laughed loudly on the battlefield.

“You would reach for the strongest of the Warring States period!?”

“Testament.”

Fukushima nodded and stepped forward.

She was a challenger, so she continued forward.


“Here I come...!”



# Chapter 65: Hopeful One in Illusory Space

# 第六十五章

## 『幻つ間の希望人』



これほどに  
思い描ける戦場は無く  
これほどに  
動き切れる戦場も無く  
配点（動くが勝ち）

*No battlefield*

*Is more unimaginable*

*No battlefield*

*Allows for greater movement*

### **Point Allocation (To Move is to Win)**

Henri sensed the auditory and tactile feedback of a swordfight.

She fought to the southeast of Paris. She was about a kilometer removed from the road where she had engaged the enemy.

She stood on what amounted to a field while crossing blades with Kiyomasa.

She had summoned her *Lourd de Marionnette* and she attacked with its four long swords.

Her opponent defended and attacked with two half-sickle spears.

Henri was on the attack, but her opponent had the greater defense.

*...Is she primarily buying time while making an attack whenever I show an opening?*

And right now was not Hexagone Française's time to defend.

"Will you not withdraw!?"

Kiyomasa did not answer her shout. She simply moved her mobile shell around as if dancing and blocked Henri's large swords.

Henri had four blades while her opponent had two.

But Henri's anti-*Lourd de Marionnette* swords were heavy. She could not move them as nimbly as Kiyomasa's Caledfwlch.

She had hoped to make up for the lack of fine control by overwhelming her opponent with the weight of the thick blades, but...

*...I didn't expect her to use thrusters...!*

When their blades crossed due to Kiyomasa's defense, she would accelerate

Caledfwlch. Its force rivalled that of Henri's swords and metal sparks flew.

This was likely what it meant to excel at defense. But it required more than just skilled defensive techniques to pull this off. She also needed the ability to predict and calculate the force of the enemy's attack. So...

"Where did you learn this technique!?"

"The basics I learned from someone I am required to call my teacher."  
Kiyomasa narrowed her eyes as she answered. "Also, my friend is kind of an attack-only person, so I have lots of practice from sparring with her."

"Do you refer to Fukushima?"

Fukushima was quite skilled, so it made sense that Kiyomasa was as well.

She took this seriously.

*...If only Armand could do the same...*

Having someone so unmotivated around did nothing to improve everyone's abilities.

"You must have an excellent environment there."

"Testament," replied Kiyomasa while moving forward.

She sent out both spears in quick succession and rushed forward with the same speed.

There was weight behind her steps.

"...Toh."

Henri found it dangerous how she occasionally deflected her swords. And...

"Got it."

One of those masses of metal suddenly split apart.

One of her swords' blades split off of the reinforcing back.

The separated metal blade and frame floated in the air. The hilt just barely fastened them together, but with the main axis gone, they spilled out and various parts produced metallic sounds.

*...It broke!?*

The object in the air was no longer usable.

Kiyomasa had made it that way.

...*Was that...*?

She knew what it was. When Caledfwlch had blocked the sword, it had made an attack on the area from the tip of the blade to the seam between blade and reinforcement. That was what she had “got”.

Henri had quickly pulled it back, but Caledfwlch had greater acceleration. And after the sword was blocked, there would be plenty of openings to attack.

“Honestly.” Henri lightly fell back. “Humans never cease to provide tasks for us *Belle de Marionnettes*.”

“Then allow me to provide another task for you.” Kiyomasa glanced down at the sword parts fallen to and rolling along the field. “I will destroy another one. Otherwise, you will be at a disadvantage.”

At first, Henri did not know what that meant.

But after a moment she understood.

“Do you think you are the strongest?” she asked as the iron-smelling wind washed over her. “Since you seem to think I would be at a disadvantage without equipment equal to yours.”

“No. Unfortunately, I am not the strongest.”

Kiyomasa turned toward her with a smile.

But that smile was unique. The ends of her eyebrows were somewhat lowered and she opened her lips to speak.

“There are people stronger than me. At least three.”

“And who are they?”

“Testament. One is Fukushima-sama. Another is the Peerless in the East who Fukushima-sama has set her sights on. And the third,” Kiyomasa nodded, “is the teacher who taught me to swordfight.”

“Testament.” Henri nodded. “I will work to expand that category.”

*That will be no easy feat*, she thought.

After all, her hearing devices had been picking up a certain noise for a while. The wind carried over the clashing of metal blades.

The density of that noise was abnormal. It would sound like a solid bombardment before suddenly disappearing and becoming a strike as heavy as an artillery blast.

*...Is that Master Danzou and Fukushima Masanori?*

What level had their battle reached by this point?

*This is an unusual experience*, thought Fukushima.

She did not understand her enemy’s attacks.

She understood they were known as illusions, but the method and logic of them made no sense.

She was battling Katou Danzou on the road in front of Paris.

That much was fine. It made sense.

Katou Danzou’s left hand held a long kunai in an underhand grip and his right hand held one in an overhand grip. She understood he was using those to attack.

But what came next was the problem.

Blades would suddenly fall from the sky in the middle of his attacks.

Swords fell from somewhere to attack her openings, as if they were dangling down from an unseen ceiling.

And when she tried to move forward to dodge them, she felt something grab and tug on the back of her collar or hem of her skirt.

When she took a step, the ground below her feet would sometimes become water, but what would have happened if she had completed those steps? It was night, but it had still looked like some kind of enormous silhouette swam below

the water.

At one point, she had seen a severed head at her feet.

That one had been bad.

For a certain reason, it had snapped her mind back into focus and she had recalled Kiyomasa being hit by a similar technique. According to Kiyomasa, she had seen a head similar to her own on the ground just before being hit by just such an attack.

Kiyomasa's words had saved Fukushima.

She had instantly leaped back and escaped unscathed, but she had felt an odd chilly presence at her neck. Almost like two hoe-like objects had just about split her neck open vertically.

*...What was that?*

But she could find no answer to that question. She remained confused by the battle as Danzou continued making attacks.

He was fast.

He used his small body to make a barrage of attacks and sometimes used his entire body for a single tackling attack.

That said, he only came up to the bottom of her chest. However, his stamina seemed to let him keep up his speed and agility forever. That was troublesome and creepy.

He kept up the attacks without ever running out of breath, so she was forced to fight a defensive battle even while holding her spear short.

Her blade did sometimes reach him. But...

"Oh?"

Danzou readily let her lop off his arm or hand.

And as soon as she saw the body part spinning through the air...

*...Huh?*

For some reason, she found his blade moving toward her hand or arm.

He turned it around.

The following cold sweat and test of her reaction speed left her chilled.

She did not understand.

Also, his movement was ridiculous.

When attacking, he would gain speed in midair and sometimes come to a complete stop off the ground.

She thought he might be using acceleration spells and fall control spells, but that was not it.

If she had to describe it, the term “illusion” seemed to fit best.

“Testament.”

Fukushima thought, *I can see why he is known as the Sanada Ten Spears’ Great Teacher.*

*...So he is the one that trained them.*

“There is one thing I wish to ask thee.”

Fukushima sent a question into Danzou’s barrage.

“Has any member of the Sanada Ten Braves been a match for thee?”

“Good question...”

Fukushima heard Danzou speak from beyond the overlapping sparks created by his right and left blades.

When she blocked the long kunai, he jumped weightlessly back.

“If I had to pick one, I would say Anayama did pretty well. His ninja technique is simple, but his focus has some decent idiosyncrasies.”

“Anayama...”

*Uh, oh,* thought Fukushima.

*...Umm, which one is that?*

She remembered facing those ten in the past, but their names had been



different back then. And Danzou would not know what she meant if she asked how many from the left he was.

She decided to ask some leading questions while they sent out their blades and sent sparks flying.

“Oh, yes. That short one.”

“He’s tall!”

“...Um, the one with large eyes.”

“His eyes are narrow, you fool!”

“Then, um, the one with the impressive hair.”

“His hair is short, you buffoon...”

“Then that one that doesn’t stand out much.”

“That’s the one.”

“Testament. ...All’s well that ends well, right?”

“Not at all, you dullarrrrrrd!”

He made a harsh attack. She just barely caught it on Ichinotani’s shaft, but...

*...Huh!?*

It had a lot of force behind it. The impact was enough to knock Ichinotani upwards.

She was sent airborne, so she flipped around and went in for a landing. But when she looked below her...

*...Water!*

That had not been there before.

It was an illusion.

Danzou saw Fukushima avoid the ground.

She used Ichinotani to avoid the water below her. She slammed the butt of the spear against the edge of the puddle to launch herself outside its range.

*Well done for a split-second decision,* thought Danzou.

*...She is quite good.*

Not many people had ever endured this many illusion attacks.

The only people this had failed to work on were Shingen, aka Yoshitsune, and Kagetora, aka Marfa. But...

*...Being with those two was a lot of fun.*

They had inspired a sense of inferiority since his spell would not work and a sense of peace because he need not use it. Being able to serve someone without reservation was a wonderful thing.

It meant *he need not win.*

But he knew this opponent was different. Because...

“Let me ask you one thing.”

“What is it?”

It had to do with what happened earlier.

“You saw your doll’s head before, didn’t you? ...How did you ‘realize’ what that was?”

“Doll?”

Fukushima tilted her head forward for a moment.

But after a while she nodded.

“Testament. So that was a doll? I thought it was my own severed head. After all, it had the same blank expression I always have. That felt so awkward it brought me back to my senses.”

Danzou was briefly left speechless by that answer. He gasped.

“Ha.”

And a quiet voice was pushed from the bottom of his lungs.

*...This girl...*

*I can’t let my guard down around her,* he thought. After all, based on his

calculations...

“It didn’t look like a doll?”

It should have. But Fukushima responded without tilting her head.

“It was too well made to.”

“Is that so?” Danzou nodded and took a fighting stance. “Then I shall *have you kill me.*”

Fukushima felt like Danzou had moved slightly closer.

She then realized power had filled him as internal pressure, but...

“Is that where I am?”

She suddenly heard his words from directly in front of her.

“...!”

It was not Danzou’s blade she deflected with the shaft. It was her own experience.

The memory within her, the training she had repeated with Kiyomasa and the others, and the awareness she had gained through strength all reacted to Danzou’s attack. And...

“Headfirst Fall!”

She activated herself. She used the power she had been holding in reserve because this battlefield was so incomprehensible. And...

*...There!*

Danzou had circled to the left.

She “passed” the blade he sent out.

She used the ideal movement.

She could not explain what she had done, but her body did it.

She controlled her body to dive in between the attack and defense. Rather than “seeing” her enemy’s attack or defense, it was more like she was

“calculating” the timing.

Before she could even see it, she struck at her opponent’s opening and circled around.

“...!”

She made a horizontal slash of Ichinotani’s tip to slice open Danzou’s side.

A moment later, Danzou’s body burst open. The body popped like a balloon and the head tilted back.

The face had no eyes, nose, mouth, or anything else. And...

*...Behind me!*

Before she could turn around, she felt something on the butt of her spear.

She reacted instantaneously.

She spun her body forward and grabbed the spear near the tip. And she turned around.

A white arm growing out of thin air had struck the butt.

There was nothing actually on it. It was an illusion.

The arm disappeared. It became ether light fog and vanished into the darkness.

Fukushima did not even wait for that as she sank down. And from overhead...

“Whoops.”

Danzou descended from above in an attempt to pierce her head.

What had he been standing on? Or had he jumped?

She did not understand any of it. But she gripped Ichinotani’s shaft with the tip still directed behind her.

“—————”

She used a snap of her wrist to send the tip backwards.

She heard the metallic clang of a hit behind her.

At the same time, the Danzou falling from overhead went limp and separated

into individual parts.

That one had been a doll. So what had produced the metallic clang behind her?

*...That one is...*

It was her.

When she looked back, she saw Ichinotani's blade stabbed deep into her own gut.

And in that instant...

"Headfirst Fall...!"

Fukushima felt a presence trying to slice open her gut.

It was the same as when she saw the severed head before.

But there was one difference from before.

*...I made the ideal movement!*

She had moved to search out the illusion's identity.

She circled behind the presence trying to slice her open.

"Here...!"

She grabbed and spun Ichinotani with her fingers. She made a slash with enough force to spin it vertically and slammed it into empty air.

A moment later, she found a certain result.

"...Here?"

An attack from behind was launched on her left side.

It was a slash from a long kunai.

Danzou saw his enemy jump out of the way.

He had felt it land. The attack from his right kunai had definitely sliced Fukushima's side. However...

*...Was it too shallow!?*

There was a single reason for that.

His left hand held a long kunai with an underhand grip. That was to protect his left side.

When Fukushima had spun Ichinotani vertically, the butt end had rapidly spun toward him.

Of course, Ichinotani's shaft was long. While it could have reached him behind her, her body got in the way when it rotated vertically and it could not spin further in than her side.

Or so it should have been.

Fukushima had done something different. While Ichinotani spun vertically, she had swung the tip outwards and made a sweeping blow behind her with the butt.

She had combined attack and defense into a single action.

For a spear-user, doing that with the tip, shaft, and butt was the ideal.

That tended to make them quick to attack and slow to defend in battle, but...

*...This girl...!*

This was not how she had fought the other day.

When had she corrected herself? And...

"Now you've done it...!"

Her attack with the spear butt had reached him.

It split the left side of Danzou's head and blood burst out.

Fukushima knew she had misjudged the depth of the ideal movement, but it had still reached him.

And she understood something else too.

She had not predicted Danzou's attack from behind.

She had only managed to counterattack due to her training. It came down to her defensive senses that Kiyomasa had clued her into the night before. That had allowed her to take defensive action without checking where the enemy was.

Meanwhile, she concluded that the illusions she had seen all fell into one of two patterns.

“The first is an illusion of how I will move or attack.”

That was what transformed her attacks into her opponent’s, sending them back at her.

As for the other...

“An illusion suddenly attacks me when I move.”

That was the water puddle, the sword falling from above, and the severed head.

*But, she questioned herself. The latter appears to be a surprise attack, so how was I able to avoid them at the last second?*

A surprise attack should be unavoidable.

And why had the final attack to her left side been the only one *from Danzou himself?*

The answer to those questions was simple.

*...They appear to be catching me off guard, but I am actually sensing some kind of danger or unease in advance.*

Below her feet as she landed, overhead when she attacked, in front of her during a gap, and every other enemy movement that brought a sense of danger. She knew what the enemy’s illusion was.

“Thy power allows thee to manifest the fears and hopes within my thoughts, doesn’t it?”

And...

“Thou made that last attack thyself because I had begun to face my own fears, correct?”







加藤・段蔵

Fukushima heard a voice.

“Ha.”

Danzou’s laughter continued from there.

The small old man bent his head back a bit.

“What if it is? ...Identifying my illusions gives you no means of fighting them. As soon as you hope to land an attack on me, I manifest that hope as my own. And as soon as you sense a disadvantage, that fear is physically manifested. You will ultimately be killed by your own hopes and fears.”

“Testament. Then we are the same,” said Fukushima. “I only need evade every attack I hope for and strike down every fear I expect.”

“Can you do that?”

Fukushima inhaled when she heard that question.

She felt pain in her left side, but the divine protection was taking effect. So...

“I shall prove it with my own body.”

“You do know who I am, don’t you?”

Fukushima nodded and faced him. Half his face was wet with blood and his features were not those of a human.

That inhumanness was no more than an illusion on her part, but...

“Thou are a dragon, are thou not?”

“Yes, I am indeed a dragon.”

“Thy name?”

“Katou Danzou. ...My current form is my form. I am that sort of Celestial Dragon.”

*I see,* thought Fukushima.

As long as he had his illusions, he had no “true form”. Even if he was a Celestial Dragon, he likely had no definite form.

“So should I think of this as facing a dragon incarnation?”

“No. A Celestial Dragon incarnation.”

Danzou smiled and prepared to fight. He spread his legs and pointed his right hand at her.

“Come! Human!”

The Terrestrial Dragon protecting the east gate of Paris’s wall heard the clashing of swords a few kilometers away.

“Wow...”

The Terrestrial Dragon reflexively shrank down.

While he did so, he saw sparks scattering at blinding speed. The flying sparks and ether light moved at a much denser and more crazed pace than before. And on occasion...

“Oh.”

An intense roar would arrive as a deep noise and shaking.

It was clearly the tremor of a colossal presence stepping on the ground.

“Incredible... He can emit the power of a dragon while in human form?”

“Do you know him?” asked a student on the wall.

The Terrestrial Dragon shook his head. It was a frantic motion.

“No, I don’t. I only heard a bit from Lord Bernard before the battle. Apparently, he led a dragon army in a part of the invasion 800 years ago. ...So he’s here, huh?”

After that, he spoke up to the students on the wall.

“Y’know, if that’s who that old man was, you should’ve told us beforehand. The dragons who were already defeated didn’t get a chance to greet him. That’s a shameful thing for our clan.”

“Yeah, but we only just learned he was a dragon, too. The Roi-Soleil and the other officers might have known, though.”

“Oh...”

The Terrestrial Dragon looked up into the night sky and sighed.

“I was wondering why Lord Bernard was keeping his distance, but this explains it...”

“Why would that be?”

The Terrestrial Dragon answered while listening to the sound of artillery fire.

“I don’t really get it myself, but Lord Bernard seems to avoid keeping any Far Eastern acquaintances.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. It’s simply customary for Terrestrial Dragons to offer up their lives to the Celestial Dragons. Just having him eat with us yesterday was an honor to our clan. But...that Celestial Dragon over there is being pretty stubborn too.”

That was obvious at a glance.

Ether light scattered through the battle. They were likely using some kind of spell, but it was scattering at a level close to a fog.

The “mold” composing the Celestial Dragon’s body was breaking down and leaking ether.

That was like a Celestial Dragon’s lifespan.

Without fighting, he would likely last a few more years. But dragons were a combat species. They lived in battle and they died in battle.

“It is a matter of honor,” said the Terrestrial Dragon.

He felt that Celestial Dragon intended to use the outcome of this battle to decide whether or not this would be the end for him.

If he won with few injuries, he could join the ranks of another battle. But...

“But I wonder. Even if he lives a long life after this, he might not ever fight a battle as good as this.”

“Is this battle looking good?”

“I don’t know,” said the Terrestrial Dragon. “But what counts as a ‘good

battle' to you humans? Is it this?"

Danzou's body trembled from his own actions.

*...Splendid.*

He was an Illusory Dragon. His base strength was that of a Celestial Dragon, but he could also place his opponent's "imagination" on top of that.

In other words, he could manifest his enemy's imagination and fear as his own power.

And since he was born with this ability, he saw the combination of his power and his opponent's "imagination" as who he was in that moment.

The power he was given by this enemy was great.

Just how powerful a foe did he appear to be to her? And just how powerful was the fear she felt about herself?

It was splendid.

And he moved.

"Now...!"

He sent his blades toward her and moved forward. He did not keep any strength in reserve. He moved forward while filling each and every movement with a dragon's full power. So the enemy's defenses were meaningless. Trying to block his attacks would only send her flying. His feet shook the earth and the tremor restricted his enemy's movements.

And the enemy used...

"The bare minimum of ideal movement, hm?"

She controlled her body to slip within his actions and then escape back outside of them.

Her movements were predicting his attacks and defenses. In something that was not quite a counterattack, her blade would slip into the gaps between his rapid-fire attacks.

It was troublesome. The more he did, the more his injuries grew.

But his attacks were not meaningless.

He did not land any direct hits, but he was straining and harming her body.  
Also...

“There.”

He manifested her fear.

The grass grabbed her leg and a blade appeared to try to lop off her head from behind.

Just how much worry did this enemy carry inside? And just how much of it had she shaken off?

She fascinated him.

What was hidden in this enemy's past? What was the source of the worry and strength in this enemy who constantly carried such a great weight?

Danzou wanted to know. Because knowing would make him stronger. And...

“Danzou-dono...!”

He heard a voice. The enemy spoke through the swordplay.

“I have realized something!”

“What is it!? Tell me!”

She spun her spear around, dodged his blade, and let her black hair fly behind her as she answered.

“Did thou always have that form!?”

That question just about made Danzou lighten his attack.

He briefly recalled his life in Sanada.

400 years ago, when they had moved from Europe to Sanada, the people there had feared them but warmly welcomed them.

*...And later, those 10 arrived.*

Had this enemy realized what had happened there?

But he could not say that here.

As a Celestial Dragon, this was something he could not say. So...

“I am not at liberty to say!”

“Testament...!”

How had she interpreted that? But she had said this was something she had “realized”.

“Humanity is so very soft!”

Danzou raised his voice and approached the enemy.

This enemy was interesting. How much did she hope for and what was she reaching for?

*...Show me!*

So to pursue his curiosity, Danzou made the battle even denser and deeper.

If the enemy circled inward, he would bend his elbow and pursue her. If she circled outward, he would spin his body and pursue her.

He would rapidly pull on or knock back the jabbing spear to knock her off balance.

And he realized he was gradually outdoing her speed.

The enemy was beginning to increase her judgment of his strength.

Because they continued to fight yet she could not defeat him, she thought of him as a powerful enemy. And that strengthened him.

That was convenient.

He did not consider it unfair to use his enemy’s misjudgments. Illusions were the *truth* to his enemy.

He accelerated. He accelerated to live up to his opponent’s expectations.

“Ohh...!”

He rushed toward her.

He placed himself in the gap between her attack and defense.

Danzou directly faced his enemy as their powers crossed paths.

From his perspective, the enemy's spear circled in from the outer right while he sent his left kunai in on the left.

In an instant, the enemy's spear spun to the side. She spun the front end of the shaft around her waist to sweep it toward him from the outside.

If he made an attack, her attack would hit him.

Of course, he had the strength of a dragon. A blade might be a problem, but the shaft was not going to do anything to him. However...

"...!?"

Fukushima reached back with her right hand and grabbed the butt end of the spinning shaft.

Her right hand definitely pulled back on the butt end of the shaft as it circled from her waist to her back.

The front end of the sweeping shaft slid back. That meant the blade at the tip would hit him rather than the shaft.

This deterrence attack combined attack and defense.

Danzou had tried to make a backhand blow with the long kunai in his left hand, but now the spear tip was going to hit him on the back of his left side.

He continued the swing of his left arm regardless.

He stabbed at the left side of Fukushima's back.

She had her right arm pulled outwards. If anything, the recoil of her right arm was moving her body toward him on her left. So he could stab her.

And he made a leap.

He began jumping over Ichinotani's tip like he was performing a Fosbury Flop.

He leaped.

He arched his navel toward the heavens and continued swinging his left arm



toward Fukushima's back.

And that left blade tip pierced something: empty air.

He saw Fukushima's body moving away.

The right hand moving Ichinotani outwards had let go of the shaft.

Ichinotani continued spinning around her waist. But she was no longer bound by Ichinotani's weight and she raised her left arm.

"Toh."

His blade passed below her left arm.

His attack had missed.

He continued rotating his body from the jump. He made a reverse flip in the midair.

Below him, Ichinotani was spinning around Fukushima's waist. The tip was passing by her back and the butt was pointed his way. And she used her right hand to strike Ichinotani from below.

The spear butt rose up diagonally and entered the grasp of her raised left hand.

She launched the butt toward him in midair.

It was a sharp strike. However...

"————"

A hand grew from empty air and grabbed her right elbow. And another her collar.

She frowned at the sudden seizure, but...

"...!"

Danzou sensed her skill in the fact that she altered the spear butt attack into a downward swing instead of a jab.

After all, he had used an illusion to correct his midair course and descend straight down.

If she had attacked diagonally up to where he had been, he had planned to

attack her as he landed, but...

*...This girl...!*

The clinging hands had vanished from the spear butt attack and the swinging of her body.

*How?* asked Danzou.

She was filled with such worry and fear, so how could she continue forward and sweep it all away?

Then it hit him.

*...Just how powerful an enemy has she set her sights on?*

The Peerless in the East.

That was easy enough to say, but this girl had to know a fraction of what it meant.

This was more than just words. She had come into contact with that level which was nearly impossible to achieve.

And that meant she must know she did not even come close at her current level. So...

“You do not reject your fears and worries, but you possess the determination to shake free of them. Is that it?”

Danzou just barely dodged the spear butt sent his way. And he did so by ducking low so the jabbing shaft effectively rested on his right shoulder.

The shaft was on his right shoulder.

He did not have time to grab it. It would escape before he could.

So he used his great strength as a dragon. As he stood up, he sent force straight down from his hips and knees and the opposite force from the earth escaped through his shoulders.

He converted a dragon stomp into a super short span shoulder attack.

If the force hit the shaft on his shoulder and knocked it upwards, Fukushima would lose her balance.

And the tremor created from a dragon's full strength did indeed send Ichinotani's shaft upwards.

This was a hit from a dragon's physical strength, so...

"It will launch you along with the spear, girl...!"

As soon as he said that, Danzou saw something in front of him: the bottom of a foot.

"...!?"

Fukushima made up her mind in an instant.

As soon as she knew Danzou's strength was going to knock the spear butt upwards, she moved forward.

"Headfirst Fall!!"

She only needed two steps...no, one step. She took the step, and...

*...Don't expect it to hit!*

This enemy would consume that expectation. So she had to simply focus on her movement.

"...Oh!"

Fukushima held Ichinotani below her right arm and kicked at Danzou's face.

A moment later, her body bent backwards. She spun to the point that she saw the ground behind her and for a second time...

"Headfirst Fall!!"

She used her kicking leg as a pivot as she took more air into her lungs, accelerated, and spun.

She held Ichinotani close and felt her entire body straining as she rotated.

She was not launched away. She threw even more acceleration into a second, ricochet-like acceleration.

"Ichinotani...!"

Danzou saw it even though the kick had dulled his vision.

A black line drew a circle in front of his eyes.

That was Fukushima's hair.

However, she had not been launched away. She had used a series of acceleration spells to redirect the dragon force and she spun in midair.

The result was obvious.

He saw Ichinotani's tip springing up toward him from below after it made a half-rotation.

The way it tore through the ground like a claw was proof enough it carried the strength of a Celestial Dragon.

He had to dodge this, but he had only just forcibly stomped the ground.

He could not move. At best, he could weakly swing his arms.

"Kh...!"

He took Ichinotani's direct attack on the right side of his chest. And it immediately reached his back.

"—————"

His entire body shook from the slicing.

Fukushima lost control immediately after feeling the tactile feedback.

She had placed two acceleration spells on top of a dragon's momentum. She was also spinning, so she quickly lost control of her speed. Also...

*...My left leg...!*

A hot line ran from her left thigh to her left knee. Danzou's right blade had hit her during that attack. It had to be a shallow strike, but the force of her spin would have helped it. However...

*...I am impressed he could attack during that!*

He should have gone limp and completely collapsed. Even if he had done it with his arm muscles alone, he would have had to defy the rest of his body's movements to do it. It would have been a strain on his muscles and may have even torn some.

But she did not have time to linger on her admiration.

When she hit the ground starting with the spear tip, she and Ichinotani bounced along the ground like a wheel.

She made three rotations with two long bounces in between. Chunks of dirt filled her mouth and the grass slashed her cheeks until she came to a stop collapsed on her side.

“...!”

She was still conscious. Although she may have passed out for a few seconds.

But she was aware of herself breathing there.

She was alive.

She could tell the first-aid spells were activating across her trembling body. Blood oozed from her left leg and it tickled as it dripped down.

She was alive, she had her senses, and she could breathe. Also...

“—————”

She saw it. She could see the sky illuminated by Paris's lights and filled with an ocean to the east, west, and south.

So she twisted her body, placed her hands on the ground, and got up.

Miraculously, Ichinotani remained in her hand, so she used it like a cane to rise to her feet.

“Ah...!”

She exhaled, spat out the dirt that had gotten into her solidified saliva, and inhaled.

It was cold.

Had the air really cooled this much? And...

*...Where is Danzou-dono?*

When she turned toward the road...

“Fukushima-sama!”

She heard Kiyomasa’s voice from the left, which was to the south.

She turned that way and saw the girl running to her side with Caledfwlch in hand.

“Are you okay, Fukushima-sama!?”

Fukushima listened to Kiyomasa’s voice.

“Watch out!”

Kiyomasa told her to “watch out”.

When she heard that, Fukushima wondered if she was caught in some kind of illusion.

Once, when they had faced Danzou on the ironclad ship to Paris, she and Kiyomasa had seen different things.

Then could Kiyomasa be seeing something different from her?

*...If so...*

“Eh?”

Fukushima realized she was collapsed on the ground.

Even though she had gotten back up after striking Danzou and rolling with Ichinotani.

*...An illusion!?*

Fukushima realized the substance in her mouth was not dirt. It was blood.

And the air she was breathing...

*...Smells of iron and fire.*

This was the battlefield. Then she needed to get up as soon as possible. But

just as she thought that...

“Fukushima-sama! Are you okay!?”

Kiyomasa ran over to her from the south.

But Fukushima was trembling and she must have somewhat lost consciousness. She could not speak.

Kiyomasa must have known what state Fukushima was in because she got down on her knees after running over. Kiyomasa reached a hand below her arm and lifted her to her feet with the assistance of her mobile shell.

“You need healing.”

“No, I must continue fighting.”

“You take everything so seriously, Fukushima-sama...”

Kiyomasa had a bitter smile in her voice as she lifted Fukushima to her feet.

Fukushima made sure she kept Ichinotani in her right hand as she nodded to Kiyomasa. And she spoke to the girl brushing the grass and dirt off of her from behind.

“Thank thee, Kiyo-dono.”

“You’re welcome. But what happened? Your right leg is so badly injured.”

Fukushima had a reflexive response to those words.

At the same time, she realized there was a white blade growing from the top of her left chest.

It was Caledfwlch. One of its blades was piercing her from back to chest.

And while standing behind her, Kiyomasa kept her face hidden and spoke with a smile.

“You can rest now, Fukushima-sama.”

Kiyomasa’s words told Fukushima something: *Oh, so this is an illusion.*

And she slowly turned back toward Kiyomasa.

That girl had suggested exactly what Fukushima had been thinking for a while now.

*...Can't I just give up on it all?*

She had thought the same thing the night before. However...

"I am in thy debt." Fukushima spoke to the smiling Kiyomasa. "Kiyo-dono would never say that even if she thought it."

That left only one explanation for what she had said.

"The weakness within me was drawn out using Kiyo-dono as a shield."

*Sorry. I have tarnished thy name, Kiyo-dono,* thought Fukushima.

But she had something else to say to her own fears and worries that had to exist beyond that smile.

"Thou may stay there."

"I can?"

"No matter how much thou grab at my back or sweetly tempt me, I shall only shake free of thee and continue onward."

"And if you can't escape me?"

"Then Kiyo-dono and the others shall scold me and accompany me."

After a moment, Kiyomasa smiled bitterly. However...

"You are no longer alone, are you?"

"I never was. But..."

But...

"I only now recalled that fact."

With those words, Fukushima reached out to the version of herself in front of her and pulled her close.

She pulled in those worries, fears, and everything else.

"So I will no longer fear that."

As soon as she embraced her, her surroundings shattered.



Fukushima was removed from the effects of the illusion.

“Ah...!”

Fukushima gasped for breath and realized she was down on her knees.

She was on the battlefield. She had collapsed to the side of the road leading to Paris and there was dirt in her mouth.

*...My left leg!*

There was indeed a wound on that leg and blood was dripping from it.

It was the wound that had helped her realize something was “off” about Kiyomasa in the illusion.

She was right-handed. She used her left leg as a pivot, so she tried to avoid injuring it. But in the illusion, Kiyomasa had said it was her *right* leg that was injured.

That would have been quite convenient for her, so she had decided that was an illusion.

If she had not turned around then, Caledfwlch would have stabbed through the center of her back.

Of course, she still had that wound. When she tried to move her left shoulder, her left shoulder blade strained and a sticky wetness fell from the chest of her inner suit.

*...What an incredible technique!*

This was different from the previous illusion techniques. It had not happened in reality. It had entered her senses themselves.

“Does that mean Danzou-dono and I are closer than we were?”

“I suppose it does,” said a voice.

Danzou was there, about 15m ahead of her.

He held a long kunai toward her and was down on his knees just like her.

He directed his sharp eyes her way, but...

“Kh.”

Glowing fog suddenly burst from his entire body.

That Celestial Dragon’s final moments had arrived.

Then his short body slowly fell forward.

The Celestial Dragon ninja collapsed onto the wheel-worn road with his long kunai still aimed her way.

“...Damn.”

He lay flat on the ground.

Danzou realized his end had arrived.

*...So it ends here!*

He could still sense worries and fears in his enemy. Her awed fear of him as a Celestial Dragon was definitely reaching him.

His mind was linked to the realization of just how great a being a Celestial Dragon is.

*Indeed, he thought. I am only connected to you via your mistaken impression of me, but humanities’ feelings about dragons are the proof of our existence.*

Also, he had been something of an outcast even among the dragons.

During their battle, Fukushima had asked him if he had always had that form.

The answer was “yes”.

Celestial Dragons were born when the ley lines or another ether source filled a dragon “mold”.

For ones like him, they were created from the emotions of fear and worry.

They were similar to the Loup-Garous who were formed from people’s fear of wild animals, barbarians, and the dark.

Then what about his case?

He had been born as a dragon who had a human form.

In other words, he was born from the dragons' fear of humans.

He existed as a Celestial Dragon, but he had a human form. However, he could not live with humans since he manifested the fears and worries of others.

So he had constantly fought on the front lines to prove his worth.

But the more success he had in battles against humanity, the more the dragons feared his power and kept their distance.

In the end, he had joined a group of what could only be called thugs and went to Sanada with them.

*...That was a strange time.*

Unlike in Europe, they had feared him, but they had not opposed him.

His human form had been strengthened by the people's awed fear of him, he had learned to clear the mountains and summon water, and Sasuke's group had laughed at him. When they thanked him, he would tell them his power was a direct result of how they worshiped him.

Then the Unneeded ten had arrived.

Every one of them had essentially been a big ball of worry and fear and they had been well worth training.

But no matter how much he beat them down, they had only ended up calling him their teacher. When he asked why, the second Sasuke had given a troublesome answer: "I guess because you understand us."

But it was true he had seen their worries and fears. That was why.

That was why he had made an enemy for them.

That enemy was himself, who had once consumed fears and worries to crush the humans.

But now he did it to cleanse the humans of the fears and worries that had led them astray.

*...And...*

He could not move.

Even though his enemy was feeling fear and awe.

This enemy had once defeated a certain group and filled them with fear and worry. As their teacher, he had successfully sent that fear and worry back to the enemy. But could he do no more than that?

*...Move.*

He was a Celestial Dragon. As the highest level of dragon, he could not die while shamefully lowering his head before a human.

He could not die in a way that inspired pity.

But he could not move.

His dragon strength was running out. There was fear in the enemy, but it was not enough.

Of course, he had always been an outcast. Surely it would be too convenient to ask for assistance here. In that case...

*...Sorry.*

He thought of Isa, Miyoshi, and the other children. He thought of everyone back in Sanada. He had made it here and returned those fears and worries, and yet...

“...?”

Danzou suddenly realized something while collapsed on the ground. The hands holding his long kunai still had strength left.

His strength was returning.

*...Why?*

His wondering mind heard something. It began as the blowing of the wind and then...

“—————”

He heard voices. They were coming from Paris in the distance.

But what was happening? Simple voices should not have been able to help him recover.

*...Could it be?*

He definitely heard it. The many voices were created by the crowds there and they were definitely directed at him.

“Keep fighting!”

There was no fear or worry there.

“Keep fighting...!”

Those voices were full of hope.

“We heard!”

People climbed to the top of the city walls.

There were so many of them and they had been called there by the Terrestrial Dragon guarding the walls. The dragon had asked the students on guard duty to spread word of Danzou among the people in the city. So...

“What, that old guy was some bigshot dragon!?”

They had come. It was only those who had caught on, but the people definitely exchanged glances and...

“Hey!”

“Let’s go!!”

“Testament,” they all replied. None of these people had ever met before, but...

“I saw that old man patrolling the streets around here even at night!”

“He helped me when I couldn’t get my stand up the plaza stairs!”

“He always listened to our band play in the plaza during lunchtime!”

“Yeah, but he always left without saying a word. He probably thought you sucked.”

“Don’t be dumb! He always stayed to the very end of the performance!”

“Is that so?” said the Terrestrial Dragon guarding the wall. “Please,” he added.

“These are the final moments of a Celestial Dragon who has lived for centuries. ...Let him hear your voices.”

“A Celestial Dragon...?”

They all exchanged a glance. They were all aware of the historical damage caused by dragons. But...

“So he’s the same as Bernard, right? And he’s on our side now! In that case...”

“Testament. We’ve gotta be on his side too.”

“Yeah,” they all said before turning to the Terrestrial Dragon. “What are we supposed to do?”

“I’m not really sure either. I guess send him your awe or whatever? In other words, let him know how badass you think he is.”

“And how do we do that!?”

Their shouted question was answered by a woman holding a rolling pin.

“We just have to tell him to keep fighting, right!?”

“That’s it!” they all said while turning and shouting it.

“Keep fighting...!!”

“Hey, you, student! We need a name! Not yours! His!”

“T-Testament! His name is, um, Katou Danzou.”

Everyone on the wall exchanged a glance and nodded at that name.

And they all raised their voices as one.

“Keep fighting!”

Danzou heard the voices.

“Keep fighting, keep fighting!”

He had never heard voices like this.

“Keep fighting, Danzou!”

He had never even dreamed of hearing people calling to him like this in

Europe after having been driven out of the region so long ago.

“Keep fighting!”

Yes. The people were confused. They thought he was still standing.

“Keep fighting! Keep fighting!”

He understood. He had said the same thing to the people and children so many times.

“Keep fighting, Danzou!”

Only now did he realize that these words were equivalent to awe, fear, and worry.

“Keep fighting!”

He found his illusion was fueling him with the people’s hopes for the first time.

“Keep fighting, Danzou!”

He had never seen someone fail to stand back up after hearing those words.

Fukushima saw Danzou stand up with his back to the cheers from Paris.

She could also tell he could barely move in his state. However...

“Thou must stand up.”

“I have chosen a troublesome life.”

“Testament,” she replied while Danzou stabbed his left kunai into himself. It pierced him from the left side to the left chest as if to pin his detaching left shoulder in place.

“That should do it.”

The dragon prepared to fight even as he hemorrhaged ether light.

And he slowly leaned forward.

“Here I go.”

He came.

Fukushima was on the move.

She moved dead ahead.

Illusory hands grasped at her shoulders, arms, and hips from behind.

But she ignored them as she continued forward.

She copied Seikai's method of using the wheel tracks to run up the flat surface.

And the chance to attack came to her first.

The length of her spear meant she could reach him first.

Meanwhile, Danzou only had the long kunai in his right hand.

She did not hesitate. She aimed for the bottom of his throat. That was a dragon's weak point.

She aimed there out of respect for the dragon.

Her attack reached him.

Immediately, she saw something.

At some point, Danzou's kunai had arrived below her throat.

*...An illusion!*

Her hope had been consumed and manifested for her opponent.

Danzou thought, *This battle is already over.*

This was his final illusion. After returning to his feet using the people's hopes, he had consumed his opponent's hope and overcome her.

He could do the rest without using worries or fears, so he raised his voice and shouted at the opponent before his eyes.

"Surpass me...!"

And he saw Fukushima staring straight at him within the illusion.

She could see everything from his gaze to the arm and blade tip extended



toward her own throat.

Danzou realized what it was she had aimed for in that instant.

“Will you consume my illusion!?”

A moment later, Danzou realized his hope had been consumed.

Fukushima had accepted his attack.

Danzou’s illusion system consumed his opponent’s hopes and manifested them on his side instead.

So Danzou had consumed Fukushima’s hope for her attack and used it as his own attack.

But Fukushima had just accepted that attack.

*...She hoped to be taken out by my attack!*

As a result, their attacks had been swapped out once more.

Danzou realized Ichinotani’s blade had stabbed into and through his throat.

“—————”

*Splendid*, he thought.

He had thought this would happen.

After all, he remembered what she had said at the beginning of the battle.

*...She said the doll’s severed head looked like her own.*

How you saw the severed head in the illusion was dependent on how you viewed yourself.

If it looked like a doll, it meant you were trapped by something or you sold yourself short.

But she had seen it as no different from her usual self.

*...That means you have no illusions about yourself.*

That was someone who could hold their fears and worries inside.

That ability already existed inside her; she simply had not realized it. But over

the course of the battle, she had become aware of the worries and fears within her.

And she learned how to transform those things into hope.

“You fool...!”

She was worthy of aiming for the Peerless in the East.

And Danzou received a direct hit.

Ichinotani pierced him through what would be the weak point of a dragon.

The people saw the conclusion.

Ether light exploded in the field and a dragon stood in the center of it.

“What is that...?”

The dragon was more than 100 meters long and was colored blue.

Wings and tail feathers were visible in the scattering ether fog and wind.

He was an avian dragon. He had dragon horns crowning his head, six wings, and long, decorative tail feathers. The wings and tail feathers loudly pounded on the air.

“It’s a bluebird,” someone said. “A bluebird of happiness. ...But this is the bluebird that exists in everyone’s hearts yet can’t be found in the real world.”

“Testament,” said a boy while immediately crossing himself. “See, what’d I tell you?”

He folded his hands and looked up at the scattering blue dragon.

“That dragon is on our side.”

Fukushima realized the blue dragon was looking at her.

She could somehow tell that he was leaving.

“Why?”

“Because,” he replied in a deep voice. “How do you like this form?”

“I wish thou could have shown it to me earlier.”

“Don’t say that.”

The dragon smiled a little. Or so it seemed.

“Thank you for giving me this form,” said the dragon. “I am an Illusory Dragon. But my human form and this form are both very real.”

His gaze scanned across the road.

Seikai was collapsed there. Fukushima turned toward that unmoving form.

“...?”

Just then, she heard a great windy presence as the blue dragon flew up into the sky.

He was scattering. And on his back...

...*Ah*.

She briefly thought she glimpsed something like Seikai and something like an ether fragment.

But then she realized something had fallen from above.

It was a small one of the dragon’s feathers.

She thought it would scatter as ether, but it was solid. The blue feather was about 15cm long and it gave off a faint shine.

“Danzou-dono.”

The six blue wings were already high in the sky and his form was unclear as he scattered.

But Fukushima slowly kneeled, held the feather in her hand, and lowered her head.

“Thou have my utmost thanks...!”

Danzou smiled as he scattered.

...*Honestly*.

Seikai had come with him, but he found his presence had vanished at some point.

He must have passed on already. He would be meeting with Isa wherever it was their souls gathered.

Danzou did not know where that was or what form it would take.

But he hoped it was somewhere on Sanada land.

Would he be going there as well? Or...

...Yes.

His lingering feelings about Europe were gone. He had gained something other than awe and fear there. Sanada had not been unique in that regard.

Sasuke, Saizou, and the others would not know about that either.

If he could meet them again where his soul ended up, he would tell them.

Humans and dragons had not changed at all since 400 years ago or 800 years ago, but things had still gone surprisingly well.

He was thankful for the companions who had first taught him that was possible.

He was thankful for the enemy who had taught him that in the very end.

He spread his wings and scattered as that thankfulness filled him.

And he disappeared.

While hoping people had seen that blue form of hope.

Katagiri looked up at the blue form and scattering ether light ascending into the sky.

It was so breathtaking that the ocean obscuring the sky felt like a nuisance.

But he also saw something else.

Something flew from Paris as if following the ether fog remaining in a vertical line behind the scattering.

It did not even come close to reaching that bluebird's heights, but it drew a powerful arc into the eastern sky.

*...Is that...?*

Before he could make a decision, it split apart in midair. It transformed into what looked like autumn leaves scattering in the night.

"That's Mercenary Commander Bernard!"

That was the #2 dragon fighting on Hexagone Française's side. He was known as a Swarm Dragon.

# Chapter 66: Encounterers High in the Sky

# 第六十六章

## 『高空の遭遇手達』



初めての世界に  
初めましてと  
言っているのだろうか  
配点 (こんにちは)

*Am I permitted to*

*Say hello*

*To the world for the first time?*

### **Point Allocation (Hello)**

Bernard charged forward. He approached the enemy in his dragon form.

He was not very high off the ground, so his former battle companion's dying form was overhead.

He honestly had few memories of speaking with that Illusory Dragon.

But seeing off the departed and praising their life of combat was the dragon way.

He showed respect for the path his brethren had walked and he approached a new battlefield as a tribute to the departed.

"So off I go."

The Terrestrial Dragons protecting Paris's wall nodded at those words.

There were two of them. Paris's forces were being sent to the east.

The enemy was moving below. The three airborne light warships were forming a wall along with the one already on the ground to protect the transport ship.

They placed that ship behind cover, but Bernard did not care.

He split into multiple dragons.

True to his title of Swarm Dragon, his giant form split into a thousand smaller dragons.

That full swarm attacked the enemy's barrier.

First, they moved straight ahead to crush the light warships blocking the way in the sky.



Koroku clenched her teeth within Genbu.

*...So that's how they're doing it.*

The dragons' movements were far too steadfast.

There were two light warships in the air to the west with her and three to the east. Looking at that, the west would have been the standard choice.

But the enemy had chosen the east.

She knew why.

**Kuro-Take:** "Hm, you think they're wary of your presence there, Hachisuka-kun?"

□□凸: "Because she deflected their dragon cannon the night before last?"

**6:** "We also have more ground forces left over here. Because I could take care of the enemy gods of war."

That was the reason.

That defense from the night before last had been strategically necessary. A certain idiot had been stupid enough to use one of their own as bait, but those materials had been necessary.

But that had led the enemy to mark her as a dangerous foe. And they would be even more wary with the ground forces remaining.

**6:** "I hope you've learned your lesson, Takenaka."

**Kuro-Take:** "Yeah, it was because of that that I sent Kiyomasa-kun to the east... The Roi-Soleil sure is steadfast."

She was not listening. But Takenaka had judged their enemy the same as Koroku had.

Their opponent wielded prideful strength, but he was also steadfast in his pursuit of a solid win.

□□凸: "Ah! Did they not target my area because they're wary of me too!?"

**6:** "Are you stupid?"

□□凸: "Y-you don't have to say it like that! Please explain it for me!"

**6:** “I meant your statement was unbelievably foolish in how it tried to compare the two of us.”

□□凸: “I wasn’t asking you to explain why you called me stupid!”

**6:** “Weren’t you, though?”

□□凸: “...No, I’m pretty sure I wasn’t.”

**6:** “No, you definitely were.”

**Tsurugi:** “Ah, Katagiri-kun! Your blood pressure is skyrocketing! Are you okay!? Are you becoming more manly because something just turned you on!?”

□□凸: “Someone please! Please give me some peace and quiet!”

At any rate, explaining the current situation was a pain.

It was immediately obvious why Katagiri’s location had not been targeted. So...

“If Kiyomasa’s group can return immediately...”

Just as Koroku muttered that, a large explosion of light appeared in the eastern sky.

One of the light warships firing from the air and been destroyed by the dragon cannons of Bernard’s small dragon swarm. And...

“Did it get them!?”

There was another explosion not caused by the dragon cannon destruction.

There was a reason the bursting light had turned to flames: the explosion spells set up inside the light warship had been activated.

The rumble of the self-destruct attack on the small dragons reached Koroku through Genbu’s auditory devices.

Kiyomasa saw the result of the light warship’s self-destruct.

It happened to occur just as she destroyed Henri’s second sword.

The explosion spray blossoming in the northeastern sky lit up the night, but...

*...It didn't reach the dragon swarm!*

The swarm of small dragons had moved as if they saw the explosion coming. By the time the ship detonated, the swarm was already spread out a good distance away. Bernard had predicted their move and avoided a direct hit.

The small dragons spiraled higher into the sky.

They avoided the explosive blast but rode the wind along a spiraling path up into the night sky.

They likely intended to view the entire battlefield from above and select their next target.

*...And there are sure to be attacks in the meantime.*

Her fears proved accurate. Two Terrestrial Dragons sprinted from Paris's wall.

She knew what they were doing. They were covering for the airborne Swarm Dragon while he was away from the surface.

Kiyomasa needed to quickly intercept them. However...

"...!?"

Without a word uttered, a sword dropped from overhead. It was Henri. And she had two swords lined up side by side.

"Not even your twin spears will be enough to stop this...!"

This was ridiculous, but Kiyomasa also hated that she was honestly impressed by her opponent's creativity. Still, she had to respond to this.

"Eh?"

All of a sudden, she realized she was floating.

It was the wind. The wind blowing across the battlefield had scooped her up.

The next thing she knew, Kiyomasa found she had been moved away from Henri's blade.

It was a distance of about 7 meters. That was still within range of Henri and her swords, but her timing was thrown off. And Kiyomasa saw the identity of

the wind which had carried her.

“Fukushima-sama!?”

There was surprise in her voice, but not because that girl had picked her up and swept her away.

It was due to how badly injured Fukushima was.

Her face was scraped and stained with dirt while blood still flowed from wounds on her left chest and left side. The injury on her left chest was especially bad. When Kiyomasa placed an arm around Fukushima’s back, she felt the slippery blood of an injury on the reverse side of the left chest wound. The smell of blood rose strongly from her left leg as well.

“Fukushima-sama!”

“Testament. I won thanks to thee, Kiyo-dono.”

Kiyomasa knew she had won. She and Henri had both watched the blue dragon’s flight. However...

“Testament. Kiyo-dono, I cannot fight any longer.”

That was obvious just from looking at her, but Fukushima had more to say.

“But I can carry thee over there.”

“Wait! She is currently fighting me!”

Henri held her right palm out and protested.

But Fukushima adjusted her grip on Kiyomasa and lowered her head toward Henri.

“My apologies.”

“Ah, wait!”

Fukushima did not even listen to those words.

She suddenly accelerated. She tilted her body northeast while still holding Kiyomasa, and...

“Headfirst Fall.”

Katagiri saw battles both large and small on the eastern battlefield.

His position in the south gave him a full view of the gentle slope up the eastern hill.

He had used a telescope spell to observe it all, but...

“Wow.”

The telescope *lernen figur* showed the Hexagone Française gods of war and Terrestrial Dragons charging in. Each time, the screen went dark and then the automatic brightness correction kicked in, but...

*...The large ones block the sun and then it gets way too bright once they pass by...*

It could not have been harder to tell what was going on. Also...

6: “Katagiri, fix the image.”

**Kuro-Take:** “Sorry, Katagiri-kun. Right, right, a little more to the right. Yes, there. That’s it.”

He wished his instructions were not so demanding and vague.

One thing was clear: the overall battle was being pushed higher.

The warriors to the east were somehow managing to hold back the middle gods of war, but the heavy gods of war were wearing them down. But even with those efforts, they were forced to fall back when the Terrestrial Dragons made their charge.

Perhaps due to the pressure of having only one shot at this, the eastern group climbed the hill and gathered around the landed light warship.

And they formed a dense formation.

The ocean spread in the eastern sky in order to join with the south where he was and the west where Hachisuka was. But...

**Kuro-Take:** “We need to hold out for another 10 minutes, don’t we?”

□□凸: “That simply isn’t possible!”

6: “Never say something’s impossible.”

Hachisuka's words brought him back to his senses.

On the battlefield, you were desperate. It was not an issue of possible or impossible; you were desperate. He had to avoid deciding that for everyone. So...

□□凸: "Sorry."

**Kuro-Take:** "Well, that's just how it is. Deciding when to withdraw is a job for commanders like me. I do appreciate your objective view."

He was not sure if he should thank her for covering for his mistake. But...

□□凸: "The Terrestrial Dragons are targeting the landed light warship!"

The Terrestrial Dragons were coordinating their actions.

First, one of the two moved forward.

After sending himself halfway up the eastern hill, he stood up a bit. He aimed his dragon cannon up the slope to the light warship at the top.

The warships in the air noticed and fired on him, but...

"Defense!"

The middle gods of war protected him despite their considerable damage.

Several middle gods of war layered defense barriers, aimed them toward the heavens, and guarded the dragon.

Ether light spray scattered from the other end of those barriers. The impacts shook the air and a few of the gods of war lost their balance and nearly fell. So...

"Testament...!"

The charging heavy gods of war supported them in groups of two. The metallic sounds continued as the weighed-down middle gods of war planted their feet firmly on the ground once more.

The middle god of war unit had originally been vassals for the heavy god of war unit, so they knew how to respond to their superiors' support.

"Use us as your shields!"

And those shields held their position. The attack was launched before the aerial bombardment could break through their defense barriers.

That attack was a dragon cannon.

The light flew toward the landed light warship acting as a barrier, but defense barriers opened in its path.

Just then, the other Terrestrial Dragon suddenly twisted around.

The light warship's defense barriers blocked the first dragon's dragon cannon at almost the same moment the second dragon launched his own.

The first attack shattered the barriers but was dissipated at the same time. But the second attack was set to make...

"A direct hit!!"

When the second dragon cannon was launched, the Hexagone Française gods of war did not understand what had happened.

That second dragon cannon blast should have been a sure thing, but it was launched into the sky instead of at the enemy light warship.

"...Huh?"

"Did he miss?" they wondered while they each tried to find an explanation.

Had the dragon tried to shoot at one of the airborne light warships?

Did he do that because the aerial bombardment was in the way and damaging them?

It did not last long, but the god of war pilots did find those convenient explanations.

Then reality intruded on their thoughts.

The dragon who had fired the dragon cannon was forcefully thrown to the ground.

Also, the thing which had struck the dragon from the sky collided with the ground. And...

“...!”

A wide-range explosion spread out from there, blowing away the gods of war.

**Kuro-Take:** “Okay! High return!! We can keep this going!”

Katagiri listened to Takenaka while watching the result on the eastern hill.

That hill displayed on his telescope *lernen figur* had literally collapsed.

More than 20m of the slope had crumbled and there was a shallow crater at the starting point. Also, the dirt had been torn up and the grass stripped away.

The Hexagone Française middle gods of war were lying on the dirt. A few had escaped the range of the blast and survived, so they were cautiously observing the situation along with the heavy gods of war. However...

*...They must still not know what happened.*

But Katagiri knew what that attack from the sky had been.

□□凸: “The Azuchi’s main cannon isn’t meant to be fired on people.”

This attack had been fired from a distance of approximately 18 kilometers.

□□凸: “Was that a physical shell so it could slip past the ether detection?”

**Azuchi:** “It was a physical shell from my main cannon, a .38 caliber 30cm cannon. As for the targeting, I must confess the calculations were made shortly after the battle began and were nearly guaranteed by the time the sun had set. This hit was the result of the ground forces guiding the enemy to the calculated hit point. Over.”

“Azuchi” paused for the span of a breath.

**Azuchi:** “I fired a standard 1m 12cm shell. It passed through the upper levels of the stratosphere and activated an acceleration spell at the start of its fall. A destruction spell activated upon contact, so I can predict it had about three times the force of a transport ship ramming at maximum fall velocity. ... However, the arc of the shot creates a 3m margin of error even when we can guide the enemy into position. And targeting a midway point is complex enough that you should assume there will not be a second shot. Over.”



“Oh,” was all Katagiri could say.

**Kuro-Take:** “To be honest, we would’ve shot one of those if the enemy tried attacking your group Katagiri-kun.”

□□凸: “Wh-what if we were caught in the blast!?”

**Azuchi:** “You are close enough for the 18cm secondary cannons to fire on directly. I have determined the enemy has not attacked your position because they took my artillery into account. Over.”

The result before their eyes prevented that from sounding like simple bragging.

And, thought Katagiri.

□□凸: “Why didn’t you attack Paris?”

**Kuro-Take:** “Oh, come on. We’re here to flood the city. We don’t want to provoke them unnecessarily and have that Swarm Dragon come here, now do we? We have placed the Azuchi far enough away that Mouri won’t consider it worth attacking, so it would cause some problems if we convinced them defeating it would be worthwhile after all.”

**Azuchi:** “It is my duty to carry all of you safely and comfortably to Kantou, so I would prefer to avoid any unnecessary provocation. Over.”

They scolded him for his suggestion. “Hmm,” he groaned in thought.

*...So if Hexagone Française wants to attack my area, they would have to worry about the distant Azuchi as an enemy too?*

And if they extended the battle line that far, they would end up neglecting their attacks on the other three directions.

**Kuro-Take:** “That is why Hexagone Française held Swarm Dragon Bernard in reserve. Because he can fly quickly and sink a ship with a single attack. By keeping Azuchi within his range at all times, they are telling us not to try anything funny.”

□□凸: “So the Azuchi fired its main cannon because they sent out the Swarm Dragon, right? Which means...”

“Testament,” replied Takenaka.

**Kuro-Take:** “We’ve reached the final stage. That’s true timewise as well.”

As soon as he saw those words, he saw the color red on the eastern hill.

The light warship, which had landed to protect the transport ship, had exploded.

*...I recognize that...*

It was the same dragon cannon which had sunk a transport ship in one shot the night before last. He knew who must have fired it: “The Swarm Dragon!”

“So that’s how it works!”

Koroku saw it while rushing to the east with the moderately-damaged Genbu.

That high-power dragon cannon had punched through and destroyed the transport ships she had been riding the night before last.

It had possessed the power of a large dragon, but she had failed to see anything in the firing location.

That Swarm Dragon just fired the same thing here.

The trick was simple: the many small dragons had fired their dragon cannons while fusing them together.

“So are those small dragons made of ether?”

That explained the Swarm Dragon name.

Swarm Dragon Bernard was a single dark blue winged dragon, but he could also split into countless small dragons using ether division. That made him both an individual and a mercenary force of more than a thousand.

And something happened when the thousand dragon cannons gathered together instead of scattering.

Those small dragon cannons were compressed into a Celestial Dragon’s large dragon cannon.

Koroku had been hit by that attack before, so she knew it had too much

power for her to properly deflect it with Genbu's gravity barriers. So...

"There's no way a half-destroyed light warship could survive."

The explosion on the hill had blown away the entirety of the light warship.

Its armor, frame, and other materials were tossed by the wind and stripped away into the sky.

And Koroku saw the color of the sea beyond the breaking warship.

That meant the transport ship was exposed.

Immediately, Bernard split back apart from his concentrated large dragon form.

Bernard's more than a thousand pairs of eyes saw the enemy's counterattack.

One of the two light warships remaining in the sky was charging toward his swarm.

It did not intend to self-destruct like before. Since the deck was deserted, it must have been remotely controlled, but it was firing its cannons and charging in with its belly exposed.

It intended to knock his swarm from the sky.

He could see the other ship descending to protect the transport ship.

*You're in the way, he thought. All of you are in the way. So...*

"...!"

He could not fire that concentrated dragon cannon very rapidly.

Still, he fought back against the charging light warship. He flew toward it and crashed into it, doing damage to the armor and cannons. Then he gave a command to the Terrestrial Dragon below. That lone survivor had not received a direct hit from the earlier bombardment.

"Fire your dragon cannon on the transport ship!"

He was answered with noise.

Something had hit the Terrestrial Dragon on the battlefield slope.

It was an enemy ground unit made up of normal students.

“Bear with it!”

The Hashiba students in charge of protecting the eastern hill did what they could do even as their injured grew in number.

Those with the Schau Essen divine protection took the lead and crashed into the dragon.

The M.H.R.R. students no longer used assault spears or guns. Nor did the P.A. Oda students.

They simply opened their defense barriers to the front. One of those who could jump used wind pressure attack spells and...

“Go...! The attack from the Azuchi must have left him shaken!”

“Testament!” they all shouted.

“Knock over the dragon!”

Those simple words set them all in motion. They formed four rows and collided with the side of the Terrestrial Dragon who was fixed in place thanks to the cannon blast. And those who hit first raised their voices.

“Don’t worry about me! Crush me along with him!”

“Keep your dinner down...!”

After a second, third, and fourth collision, the hits were occurring over their heads. And...

“Open fire!!”

The light warship descending in front of the transport ship began a volley with the secondary cannons on its side.

The dragon’s armor burst off and his giant body tilted.

But the dragon sent his fore legs and hind legs further down the slope. This kept his neck and head aimed at the transport ship.

“Don’t underestimate a dragon!”

“Oh, we aren’t!!”

They all raised their voices as one.

“Klassisch Kunst: Weight of Life...activate!”

More than 200 people used that spell, but they did not cast it on themselves.

The spell converted their volume into weight to provide attack power, but it was already cast on them. So instead...

“Eat our fatso divine protection!”

They cast it on the dragon.

“...!?”

The Terrestrial Dragon’s great volume was converted into weight and his giant form could no longer support its own weight.

“Ha ha ha! You didn’t notice, did you!? When we of Schau Essen use this spell, we can’t move much without these mobile shells!”

“Yeah,” more of them said. “Staying true to your desires is so great!!”

Their commander and the rest pushed more on the dragon who had lost his balance and then fallen as the slope crumbled.

The dragon rolled, but at the same moment, they heard a voice in the wind.

“Sorry. ...My fellow musketeer told me to show a little motivation.”

It was a male voice coming from the west.

“I am Armand of the Three Musketeers. I will be cutting in.”

After running over, Armand raised his arms to fight.

His gravitational control hardened the ground below the collapsing dragon. And...

“Ohh...!”

His wide-range gravitational control gave a horizontal pull on the earth’s crust

below the dragon's feet.

To keep the dragon from falling, he pulled along a table of compressed dirt with the dragon on top of it. It was more than 3 meters thick and longer than the dragon.

It supported the dragon.

The dragon had staggered but not fallen. And a moment later...

"Ha." The corner of Armand's lips rose and he fixed his hat. "This is why I hate getting motivated."

Just as he said that, his arms swelled out and burst. Radiators opened all across his body and overheated lubricant squirted out. His red clothing was stained black in no time and he fell to his knees.

But even as he trembled and stopped moving, he faced forward.

"Now."

His eyes were weak, but they focused on the dragon.

"Do it...!"

He was answered with light. The Terrestrial Dragon had fired his dragon cannon on the transport ship.

*...He did it.*

Confident this would hit, Armand shut off all his functions. He entered preservation mode.

But he definitely saw something as his consciousness shut down. A lady in black leaped onto the battlefield from behind him. That was...

*...The Genbu!*

Koroku closed her armor.

She restricted all of Genbu's armor to simply preserving itself. Instead, she sent all the power to the engine system.

*...Make it!*

She could not reach it. She did not have enough speed. But while she directed herself toward the launching dragon cannon...

“Excessive Jab!”

She sent all extra power into the destructive right arm and launched it out into the air. She had wanted to hit the dragon directly if possible, but Armand’s presence had shifted her entrance point. So she instead had to hit the dragon cannon and...

“Bend it!”

The dragon cannon flew.

The white light shot out faster than anyone could turn around and raced toward the transport ship.

“Is there no stopping it?” they muttered.

But then the dragon cannon curved slightly.

It was a miniscule thing, but its trajectory did shift just a bit up and to the right.

Koroku’s attack had shaken the dragon cannon.

But the white blast was still on its way to the transport ship. It would hit the top of the transport ship that had landed atop the hill. It had originally been aimed at the center, but this would still be a direct hit.

However, something moved in the way. An airborne light warship moved to cover the transport ship.

The dragon cannon collided with the bottom of the warship.

The light warship’s armor broke with the sound of a wind instrument. After breaking in through the bottom of the ship, the dragon’s attack smashed it from the inside out.

“Abandon ship!”

The students hurriedly jumped off as the deck exploded from below. The dragon cannon had torn through the ammunition depot within. The ship's armor split and it was engulfed in flames, but while it still remained in the air...

“...!”

It exploded.

The great noise caused the ocean to burst and blasted ether light into the sky, but the people watching it had two different reactions. The split was between the Hashiba and the Hexagone Française students.

“We can still hold this line!”

“Just a little further!”

But the responses were all identical. Both sides raised their weapons, defense barriers, and voices.

“Testament!”

Then another explosion erupted in the sky.

The light warship attempting to ram the Swarm Dragon had been hit by a counterattack.

The thousand small dragons' tackles and dragon cannons decorated the night with a massive explosion.

Smoke rose from the falling ship while it only managed to sound its alarms and open uncontrollable *lernen figurs* like a voiceless scream.

The small dragons swarmed its surface and looked down at the transport ship below.

Hashiba's eastern group had lost its light warship barrier.

Bernard saw the result of his actions.

Five of the six Terrestrial Dragons he had brought with him were no longer able to fight, but they had fulfilled their role splendidly.

It looked like the final one could still move, so...



*...The events of this battle will be passed down to future generations.*

With that in mind, Bernard prepared for his next move. He spread all the small dragons' wings to abandon the sinking warship and dive toward the transport ship visible below.

But just before he took flight, he saw a sudden light. *Signe cadres* appeared on the surface of the ship sinking below his many feet. They warned that the falling ship was uncontrollable, but...

"Why are there so many of them?"

This was odd. They just kept appearing and rose up in front of him.

They rose up precisely in front of his thousand forms as if to oppose him.

*...<Program: Transfer>...!?*

*What is this bringing?* he wondered.

Then he saw the light burst. All the *signe cadres* that had appeared in front of him shattered, but that light took a certain shape.

The white ether structures took the form of a maid *Belle de Marionnette*.

These thousand beings had appeared to oppose him and the transferred program's name was displayed.

**<Ishida Mitsunari-sama: Transfer: Success: Confirmed.>**

Mitsunari perceived the outside world.

This was a first for her. Seeing things, hearing things, and touching things were all new experiences.

*...Ah.*

She did not know what to do right now.

No, she did know what her objective was.

But as a program, she felt like she should do something to commemorate her first appearance in the world.

Small dragons existed within arm's reach in front of her.

They were a Celestial Dragon. These enemies were composed of ether, so they could interfere with a program like her.

That meant the dragon's attacks could hit her.

*I am in danger, she concluded. And, she thought. I am sorry.*

She really should have thanked everything for working properly now that she was out here in the world, but she would have to shorten the process given the situation.

*...I am sorry, world.*

But she did speak to everything out there.

"Hello, world."

She gave an abbreviated greeting to the entire world. That was her boot-up signal.

**Monkey Girl:** "Mitsunari-san! You are in danger! Leave that ship immediately after the attack!"

She knew that. And the enemy was already attacking.

The thousand small dragons used dragon cannons, tackles, or kicks. A direct hit would fully destroy her and that was likely her fate.

But that was fine. She was a program, so she could be repaired even if she was destroyed. She had simply decided for herself that she could send in enough fighters for this opponent, so she had wished to come here. So...

**Nari Nari Nari:** "Yoshitsugu-kun."

Mitsunari used the light warship's divine transmission system which was clearly still functioning since it had transferred her here. And as a Hashiba ship, that system was quite capable, so she used it to call to a friend. She spoke to her virus friend who had been rolled out ahead of her.

**Nari Nari Nari:** "Yoshitsugu-kun, what method should I use?"

**Super Justice:** "You still expect a response from me at all times, don't you?"

**Nari Nari Nari:** "It would be odd if you did not respond, wouldn't it?"

There was a pause long enough for a sigh, but he responded soon enough.

**Super Justice:** “Just use whatever attack you think is best. Unlike me, you are a proper product. ...And you are #3 of the Ten Spears.”

Mitsunari nodded. And after ending the divine transmission, she realized she had forgotten to thank him.

But the situation was already underway, so she took action. She used the last of the light warship’s power.

“Unnamed Masamune.”

Koroku saw a thousand intersecting attacks overhead.

The small dragons were attempting to break Mitsunari with their physical strength and dragon cannons, so...

*...She pulled out an ether weapon.*

The sword looked out of place with her automaton appearance and the attacks clashed with the dragon attacks.

In an instant, an incredible amount of ether exploded atop the light warship. The ship lost all power, so its lights and alarms shut off. Also...

**Nari Nari Nari:** “I destroyed a third of them!”

Just as Mitsunari’s voice vanished into the static, the light warship produced a deep explosive sound.

It was obvious what had happened. Mitsunari had hunted down a third of the Swarm Dragon while all of herself had been destroyed.

She would have made it off the ship, but...

*...I can worry about that later!*

The Swarm Dragon flew up into the air.

The explosion whipped the wind into a spiral as the enemy arrived high in the sky.

There were fewer of them, but Koroku saw something through Genbu’s

vision. With a third of their number missing, the small dragons turned to face the ground below.

They intended to do this. No, they had to do it here.

They spread and flapped their wings to make a powered dive.

And they produced countless lights in midair.

They fired a concentrated dragon cannon while descending so rapidly.

The transport ship was below them, so who could possibly stop them?

Koroku shouted the person's name.

"Come! Wakisaka!!"

The Schwarz Hexen's mobility brought her straight down.

She had raced here from Kantou while stopping to resupply just once.

*...I made it!*

Yoshiaki had suggested it when Kani had arrived.

*...She told me to go join the attack on Paris.*

The thought of working apart from Yoshiaki had brought a sense of loneliness, but that trust had made her happy. So she had smiled and nodded.

She had liked seeing Yoshiaki smile and nod back.

She had done what that smile had asked for. After watching Yoshiaki leave for the battlefield, she had left and arrived in time.

And without lowering her speed in the slightest, she sent Schwarz Fürstin down from high in the sky. Because she knew what to do here.

"When fighting dragons, a Technohexen uses sharp ascents and descents!"

It only took an instant. She saw the dark blue dragon gathering itself together with the ground in the background.

"Here you go!!"

She passed him by.

She shot right past him, but that was fine. A Schwarz Hexen's greatest attack came from the rear muzzle.

While descending, her *schale besen's* muzzle was aimed skyward. So she spun herself around in the powerful wind. And she stuffed a roll of 500-yen coins into the muzzle. Amazingly, it was 50,000 yen's worth in all.

"You gotta love Tsugi! Ask him for money and he just gives it to you!"

**Nari Nari Nari:** "Wait! Please stop deceiving Yoshitsugu-kun!!"

**AnG:** "Huh!? No, you've got it all wrong! The money is to help celebrate your first battle, Nari Nari!"

**Nari Nari Nari:** "Eh?"

**AnG:** "Yeah, that's what I'll tell him next time I see him!"

**Nari Nari Nari:** "W-wait just a second!"

Angie laughed. She laughed loudly. She was terribly exhausted and the journey here had been lonely, but she did not care. She had made it in time and she could laugh, so it did not matter. She laughed and looked up at the dark blue dragon overhead. *Umm, what was his name again? I'm terrible at matching names to faces.* But...

"Herrlich!!"

She fired.

Bernard realized the shell had scored a direct hit.

He had swung his head to dodge, but it had torn away the position of his right lung.

But he could keep going. Half his body was breaking, but the small dragons had yet to fully gather.

*...So I can make it!*

He fired his dragon cannon from 300 meters above the surface.

He did not know if this one attack could destroy the transport ship.

But even if he could not...

“Ohhhh!”

The Swarm Dragon launched his dragon cannon while essentially holding his remaining self together.

A white light shot out. It was headed toward the middle of the transport ship’s top surface. If it blasted through the ship, it would likely stop the creation of the virtual ocean.

But he saw two people on the same hill as the transport ship.

One was Fukushima Masanori who had defeated the Illusory Dragon. And the other was...

“Caledfwlch’s wielder...Katou Kiyomasa!”

Kiyomasa hurriedly prepared her weapon.

Fukushima was still on the verge of collapse and she slowly lowered to her knee next to Kiyomasa.

Kiyomasa was also worried about Wakisaka who had fallen into the forest. She had been laughing very oddly.

But she had a task to complete now. She combined Caledfwlch’s two halves, faced the dragon cannon falling from the sky, and raised her voice.

“Finish this! Caledfwlch!”

A white slash was launched heavenward to pierce the dragon cannon.

Caledfwlch’s power moved to slice through the opposing attack.

And everyone on the battlefield saw the same thing

When Caledfwlch’s blade reached the obviously-weakened Swarm Dragon’s dragon cannon...

“...!?”

It broke.

As everyone watched on, Caledfwlch's long blade broke and shattered in the sky.

And they saw what had caused it.

"The dragon cannon is growing stronger!?"

The falling light was growing denser.

The weakened Swarm Dragon's dragon cannon was clearly regaining its strength.

Just as some on the battlefield called it impossible, everyone saw it pierce the transport ship.

It was a direct hit.

The Swarm Dragon fell into the forest, leading to a few seconds of silence.

And after that dense period of time, there was a definite reaction.

The transport ship exploded.

The ocean created in the eastern sky vanished and the blast blew away the water and ether light.

And everyone realized that Paris had lost its bright light behind them.

"Don't tell me..."

The greatest of Paris's defenses was the Roi-Soleil's divine protection.

It came from the Testamenta Arma named Corpus Prudentia – Vetus.

"Its power gives light destructive power corresponding to its intensity. And that is exactly what you see here. Bernard, you did well. Excellent work."

Everyone turned toward that male voice.

A shining nudist stood at the foot of the eastern hill.

He was the Roi-Soleil and he raised his Testamenta Arma up for the Hashiba forces on the slope to see. The silver structure floated behind him like a disk

and he gestured up at it with his hands.

“It was your efforts that brought me out from Paris. You should be proud. You see, I was making some jam in the nude so I could enjoy an extremely calm and classy breakfast with Terumoto, but it all bounced up and hit me for a lot of damage. Fortunately, I have mostly recovered. ...Anyway.”

“Don’t expect us to just forget we heard that!!”

Their unified retort was not enough to stop that true nudist. He looked across the entire group and spoke.

“Hashiba, you have lost.”

Katagiri heard the Roi-Soleil’s voice over the divine transmission.

“Even with this eastern transport ship destroyed, you can likely defeat Paris with the virtual ocean created by the southern and western transport ships.”

□□凸: “Is that true, Takenaka-san?”

**Kuro-Take:** “Umm, well, it would be possible with sufficient power and time. But just listen.”

“However, the time it takes will be a problem.”

The Roi-Soleil spoke with a thoughtful tone.

He was most likely counting on his fingers. He could be even heard humming a counting song.

“With just the west and south, it will take some time to submerge the opposite side of Paris. Probably about an hour from now. Now, let us assume you will be traveling to Kantou after that. It is currently 9 at night. You cannot leave until the virtual ocean is complete sometime after 10.”

*Will that work?* wondered Katagiri. *It’s supposed to take around 8 hours to reach Kantou.*

“By the time you reach Kantou, it will be past 6 in the morning. You will arrive after the Kantou Liberation is complete. ...You will be forced to watch on helplessly as Terumoto and the others achieve victory in Kantou.”



So...

“If you wish to flood Paris as Bitchu Takamatsu Castle, then have your wish, Hashiba. We have defeated you. We may have failed against you at Magdeburg, but today we have found success. And we have taught you what it was we felt then. ...We have overturned the result with our recovery here.”

Henri stopped running.

She no longer heard anything in the night. But there was movement in bright Paris.

People were gathering on the city walls.

They were all facing eastward from that elevated position.

The Roi-Soleil was there. And...

“Everyone, look to the east. I am there. Incredible, isn’t it? Not something you see every day. Please stop throwing stones. Now, listen. ...Terumoto is in the east.”

*That’s right*, thought Henri. Their princess was in a distant eastern land participating in a battle to determine their future.

“This is a continuation of that night. That night on which we suffered such a great loss. The night that began at Magdeburg has been long, but the light of Paris has shined on us once more. And tomorrow, that long night will end and dawn will arrive. If we throw a rowdy enough party, Far Eastern mythology says the sun will emerge from the cave. ...Tomorrow morning, Terumoto will bring an end to our night. So, everyone, let us offer our final tribute.”

Henri placed a hand on her chest and spoke along with the Roi-Soleil.

“Vive la Anne...amen.”

No one raised their voice.

They simply spoke it as a known fact – as something that would be universal from now on.

And the Roi-Soleil said more.

“Our battle has ended, Hashiba. You have defeated history. We have defeated the past. There is meaning in you feeling proud of your victory. Rejoice that you have fulfilled your history recreation.”

“Now, what will you do, Hashiba?”

Kiyomasa heard the Roi-Soleil calling to them.

They all felt great exhaustion weighing on their shoulders. While enemy and ally stood up and tried to figure out what to do, the Roi-Soleil spoke and illuminated his surroundings.

“I am a third-rate actor who could not stick to the role of villain. So let me say this: If you would opt not to go to Kantou, we would welcome you.”

“Huh?”

Kiyomasa and the others tilted their heads. But the Hexagone Française group was different. Their heavy gods of war and everyone else gestured eastward with their chins or fingers.

Seeing that, the Roi-Soleil stepped forward and looked up at the Hashiba forces while shining on the earthen ground.

“It may be in name only, but you will soon be under Terumoto’s protection. And what husband does not warmly welcome those under his wife’s protection? Or...would you continue fighting a battle not found in the Testament without a win condition for either side?”

*We couldn’t*, thought Kiyomasa. Both sides had been worn down too much. Any further fighting would become a long, drawn-out affair of Paris vs. the Azuchi. However...

*...Neither side wants that.*

That was why the Roi-Soleil had pointed out how both sides’ win conditions had been met.

Welcoming Hashiba had been his way of proving that Hexagone Française’s win condition had been met. And he was saying neither Hexagone Française nor the Testament would allow Hashiba to fight any longer.

**Kiyo-Massive:** “What would happen if we kept fighting?”

□□☒: “Um, it would mean we sought a battle outside the history recreation, so we would be making an enemy of the Testament Union nations. We would be criticized by far more than just Hexagone Française for that. My job is to communicate with those other nations, so I think it would be safer to accept this offer and end the battle.”

Kiyomasa nodded at Katagiri’s use of the word “safer”.

They had to leave here soon and they wanted a safe route back.

The Roi-Soleil looked around again and spoke.

“Let me say it once more: If you would opt not to go to Kantou, we would welcome you. Some will likely head off to continue the Thirty Years’ War tomorrow, but tonight, the continuation of that long night has been ended before me. This is a brief gap in which we may ignore the history recreation. ... So can’t we party together?”

“Well...”

*Could we?* wondered Kiyomasa.

It might be possible. It might not be. But a *lernen figur* suddenly appeared overhead.

“I must apologize, Roi-Soleil.”

It was Hashiba. She used the *lernen figur* to speak.

“We will accept your suggestion to end the battle. But...I, Hashiba, and those under my command will be going to Kantou.”

The Roi-Soleil looked up at the *signe cadre* floating overhead.

It was Hashiba. She had fought against Hexagone Française for quite a long time now and would almost certainly continue to be a threat. She was a current and future enemy of the Testament Union and the European nations. However...

“Can’t you ignore everything for now and enjoy yourself with us until

tomorrow morning?”

“Some of our people are fighting in Kantou.”

“You will go even when you know you will not arrive in time?”

“Testament. Hashiba always finds a way to arrive in time.”

“Fair enough,” agreed the Roi-Soleil. He raised a hand as if to show he understood. “Testament. Then Hexagone Française demands that the M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda warriors withdraw once the virtual ocean has finished expanding. And you will not resupply or provide any assistance as you withdraw. Is that acceptable?”

“Testament. Thank you very much, Roi-Soleil.”

He felt some slight disappointment at the relief in her voice.

He then spoke to everyone who had fought in the battle.

“This is a gap in history. We find ourselves in the dark night after all has passed us by. I am sure the spirits of Hexagone Française will celebrate and pay us a visit. So I will have Paris opened. We will hold a festival until Terumoto returns. Everyone is free to come and go as they please.”

*...He sure is generous.*

Kiyomasa watched the Roi-Soleil as he walked away. Paris’s gates opened upon his arrival.

The main gates, secondary gates, and every other entrance opened.

“Vive la XIV!”

He raised his right arm in response to the voices.

“Hexagone Française’s rule begins upon Terumoto’s return! So party in preparation, everyone!”

The cries of “oh” and “testament” blended together.

The people and gods of war stood and lined up on the battlefield.

They too walked into that light.

6: “We’ve created a real threat here.”

**Kuro-Take:** “Yes, there are a lot of lessons for me to learn from this...”

“Now, now,” said Kiyomasa on the divine transmission.

“Hey, what’s all this? Did we lose?” asked Wakisaka with twigs and leaves caught in her wings and Technohexen outfit. “Ahh, I dislocated my left secondary wing a bit, so can you look at it later, Kiyo-pin? ...Whoa, Fukushiman, you sure took a beating. Want some anesthetic? Well, do you!?”

Wakisaka laughed. She was clearly exhausted and battered, but she laughed while looking at each of them in turn.

“If we still lose after taking things this far, there’s really not much we could’ve done, huh!?”

Everyone exchanged a glance at that. After a while, they all nodded and bumped fists with someone nearby.

“Yeah, not much we could’ve done!”

That was right. After seeing everyone sigh and stand up, Fukushima spoke from her kneeling position.

“Thou are truly incredible, Wakisaka-dono.”

“Yeah, you’ve gotta keep a positive outlook!”

“Um, Wakisaka-sama, could you calm down a little and help me carry Fukushima-sama? Can she ride on your *schale besen*?”

“Sure, sure. I’ll send her there at Mach speed.”

“No, you will not,” quietly warned Kiyomasa, but Wakisaka only laughed some more.

“But before taking Fukushiman to the Azuchi, can I go swing by Paris real quick? ...Hey, monkey. We’ve got an hour to spare, right? Can I go to Paris and buy some food?”

“Eh? Ehh? Well, um, it is true we have the time, but what about the money?”

“It’s called the barter system! I got some Orei Metallo when I resupplied on Sakuma’s ship!”

“No! You need to return those on the way back!”

Hashiba clenched her fists in protest, but she soon opened a *lernen figur*.

“Um, each of you may spend up to 3000 yen...”

“We can!? For real!?”

The surprised “eh?” reactions did not come from the Hashiba forces.

It was the Hexagone Française forces. The heavy gods of war, middle gods of war, and all the others looked to the Roi-Soleil.

“Roi-Soleil! Give us 3000 yen!”

“Ha ha ha. You do know that would come from your tax money, don’t you?”

That was true, but separate from all of this, the ocean spread across the night sky.

And the Terrestrial Dragon at the base of the hill stood up. He looked up to someone who stood in front of the forest on the hill.

*...Swarm Dragon Bernard...*

He had been broken by Wakisaka’s attack, but the concept of individual body parts did not mean much with him. His clothes were unchanged, but the right sleeve was empty as he beckoned toward the Terrestrial Dragon.

There were definitely those who had fallen. On both sides. The Roi-Soleil included them in what he said next.

“We will continue on to a new age. ...How about you, M.H.R.R. and P.A. Oda?”

There was no answer. But Kiyomasa saw this as the end of one battle and the beginning of the next.

What was happening in Kantou right now?

About two hours before the conclusion between Hexagone Française and Hashiba, the Siege of Odawara ended in Kantou and the Siege of Kanie Castle began.

It began with a march through the forest to reach “Kanie Castle” located in an

artificial lake. So...

“It’s our turn now.”

Kakei, Unno, and Mochizuki of Sanada stepped forward.

The three of them prepared to intercept the Musashi forces using the forest terrain.

# **Chapter 67: Regulator of the Attack Path**



# 第六十七章

## 『侵攻通路の規制者』



あのね  
あのね  
そのね  
ほら  
配点 (大当たり)

*Um*

*Well*

*Y'know*

*Look*

### **Point Allocation (Jackpot)**

*The forest is such a dangerous place at night,* thought Tenzou.

The forest surrounding Houjou's water source was not that deep, but it contained enemies.

The Kanie Castle was on the west side of the artificial lake past the forest. That was a narrow strip of land bordering the cliffs of the western mountain range.

It was not that far away if you crossed the lake and a road had been laid out for the construction of the artificial lake.

But using a boat would only make them a target. As would descending from above. Which meant...

**Uqui:** "Can't we crash a transport ship into it to end this without breaking a sweat?"

**Novice:** "The entrance to the ruins is located behind the Kanie Castle, so completely destroying the castle would be risky. That's also why we aren't using Musashi's main cannon or Ariadust-kun's Lype Katathlipse. But we still might use Lype Katathlipse if we need to end the Siege of Kanie Castle in a hurry."

**Hori-ko:** "Ho ho? Then let's hope it actually hits."

**Silver Wolf:** "Um, Horizon? It would be best if you didn't have to shoot it at all."

**Tachibana Wife:** "Master Muneshige! Master Muneshige! You don't need to set up an FAQ site!"

*Good to hear Muneshige-dono has a new hobby.*

At any rate, speed was best as a method. So...

**Musashi:** “As soon as all of you reach the artificial lake, I will send bamboo spear launchers loaded with spell charms to the lakeside. The charms will contain gravitational control spells. They are the same ones used on the rope pathways, so they will automatically set up a wide-range shimenawa net after launching. That will create two 2m-wide pathways over the lake, so please use those. This service is brought to you by the local Odawara god and the Asama Shrine. Over.”

**Hori-ko:** “Asama-sama, this is an unexpected accomplishment. You have gained 2 Horizon Points.”

Some weird new rules had just been established, but it was best to ignore such things.

At any rate, the Kanie Castle itself was about 800m long.

If there would be two routes in, the attack would be split between those two routes.

Tenzou was the attack leader for the downstream route.

Mitotsudaira was the leader for the upstream route.

She was sensitive to smell and sound, so she was perfect for traveling through the forest. Toori’s group was on that team, so she was sure to take the lead and guide the others.

Mary was also on that team. She could hear the voices of spirits, so she could learn what was happening in the forest and tell the others about most any traps. Combine her with Mitotsudaira and their senses were just about perfect. So during the planning meeting...

“Huh? So do we just not need Tenzou anymore?”

The idiot had given him a confused look, but...

*...Ninjas are an indispensable part of RPGs, you know?*

Anyway, his team was traveling along the downstream road. That team included Naito, Masazumi, Futayo, the Tachibana couple, and a unit of warriors mostly comprised of the former Mikawa guard unit.

There were a lot of thickets in the forest, but not much underbrush. That was likely due to the roads built and the people coming and going when constructing the artificial lake. They would likely arrive at the lake before even those unaccustomed to hiking were worn out.

Plus, Masazumi was handling it surprisingly well.

“Masazumi-dono, do you have any experience hiking?”

“Judge. There was a really nice mountain behind my home, so I would climb up there to collect mountain vegetables. Also, it probably helps that I’m not hungry.”

Tenzou had a feeling that second reason was more important, but he left it unsaid.

They occasionally came across long depressions where water had flowed long ago, so...

“Be careful along here, everyone. There is a dry creek bed along the ground.”

When it was too dangerous, he would lend a hand. Or he intended to, but Naito flew over with her wings and Masazumi was carried over in Futayo’s arms. As for the Tachibana couple...

“Gin, your hand.”

“Judge.”

It looked an awful lot like Gin simply jumped over with Muneshige, so did it really matter that they were holding hands?

Tenzou ended up only helping the warriors behind those five, but once they were all over...

“Thank you, 1st Special Duty Officer. I’ll never forgive you.”

“Oh, thank you very much, 1st Special Duty Officer. I’ll never forgive you.”

“Thanks for the help, 1st Special Duty Officer. I’ll never forgive you.”

“Wh-why am I sensing so much personal enmity in your responses!?”

“Tenzou, did you do something to Ma-yan?” asked Naito.

“N-no, I haven’t done anything.”

He sensed the surrounding atmosphere worsen. Without a doubt, everyone was listening in.

And Naito stopped alongside him.

“Why did you split up with Ma-yan?”

He shuddered when he initially interpreted “split up” in a different way.

“W-well, th-that was just the way Neshinbara-dono suggested dividing up our forces.”

“Hmm... Oh, but just so you know, Tenzou.”

“What is it?”

“To you, it might look like Ma-yan is doing everything she can to avoid you, but...it’s quite the opposite.”

*...Yeah, I figured as much.*

He was overly aware of how seriously he doubted she no longer liked him, but he had indeed noticed her keeping her distance.

When they linked arms, she would not look him in the eye. Stuff like that. He did wish things could return to how they were before, but...

“Does it make me a coward if I think rushing things won’t help?”

When she heard that, Naito actually opened her eyes for once. “Oh,” she said with a slight smile. Then she slapped him on the back.

“Tenzou, you’ve really matured, haven’t you?”

“Y-you’re kind of creeping me out right now, Naito-dono!”

“Calm down. Since you’ve put some real effort into this, I’ll wait three days before telling Ga-chan. But do you know why Ma-yan starting acting so weird this afternoon?”

“Yeah... To be honest, I was a little too charming.”

“But you were serious about all of it, weren’t you?”

“Judge.”

*...Oh, does this mean I really am charming?*

He realized it was too late to be wondering that. But Naito nodded and said more.

“Ma-yan’s fine, so don’t worry. When the two of you remember this later on, I’m sure you’ll realize it was a really important event for you.”

“Is that how it is?”

“Judge, judge. When Ga-chan and I remember our past troubles, we tend to whitewash what actually happened.”

With a “good luck”, the Schwarz Hexen slapped his back again and stepped back just in time for Futayo to ask a question.

“What was that about?”

“Hm? Sex. It’s about sex.”

Naito’s answer was far too dangerous, but there was no stopping it now.

“Oh, stop.”

There was a slight upward slope ahead of them. This was their destination for the time being.

Naito saw Tenzou come to a stop.

He turned back and pointed at the slope behind them.

“This is our midway point. A bit further along, it suddenly falls away by about 15 meters.”

That was strange terrain, but she recognized it.

“This terrain was eroded by a river, wasn’t it? You often see it while looking down from the Musashi.”

It was erosion terrain. It did not exist on the Musashi, but it was a common sight from the Musashi. The accumulated dirt and rain erosion around the landports at Mikawa and elsewhere were neat when viewed from above.

Now she was seeing the same thing from a horizontal vantage point. The

Mikawa group was confused by the reaction, but the Musashi group could not help but look around in fascination.

*...These little differences show up here and there.*

While she thought that, Tenzou passed her an unlit sign frame. It displayed a simple map of the surrounding area.

“After the drop off up ahead, there is more forest down below and the lake is another 100 meters after that.”

“So if we climb this slope, we can see the Kanie Castle?”

“Judge. But poke your head out and even simple motion sensors will be able to detect us. So the safest route is to avoid the slope, descend along a detour, and use the forest below as cover while we make our charge on the lake.”

“1st Special Duty Officer. So either way, we begin a charge once we descend into the forest?”

Tenzou nodded at Gin’s question.

“Correct. I will lead the way, so I would like for the Vice Chancellor’s Aide to support me. And you support him, Gin-dono.”

“Judge,” said the Tachibana couple while Naito also nodded.

*...So I take the rear this time.*

The Kantou Liberation would require aerial fighters, so Neshinbara wanted to keep anything from happening to Naito or Naruze during the Siege of Kanie Castle. So even when they joined the battle, they would provide logistical support or rescue the others.

*I wonder what Ga-chan is doing, she thought.*

“...Eh?”

Her thoughts were interrupted by a gunshot from the right. That was upstream.

The upstream team had reached the enemy’s front line.

Asama was behind Toori and Horizon.

Her jobs on the upstream team were ether detection and defense. He and Horizon were their leaders, so it was dangerous placing them on the front line, but this allowed them to use Lype Katathlipse or his ether sharing spell if necessary. Asama was also carrying Katatsubasa at her hip just in case, but...

*...I can't shoot people.*

*Not that I'm disappointed with that, but I do wish I could take a more active role here.*

Speaking of active roles, Mitotsudaira was in the lead.

"There is a fresh human scent up ahead. I think there is a trap there."

She said things like that and helped them avoid dangerous routes as they traversed the forest. But at the same time...

"This has gone so smoothly I'm worried we are being guided along the trapless path. I think there is a trap buried over there, so let's remove it and take that route."

And when they had asked her why she could do all this...

"When my mother kidnapped my king at IZUMO, I learned a lot pursuing her through the forest. And afterwards, I thought back to the problems I encountered and researched how to deal with them."

*That's Mito for you*, thought Asama, but she was also surprised to learn such a close friend was going to such efforts while she was not looking.

Of course, Asama was probably doing the same and Mitotsudaira had to be surprised by her at times.

*...Come to think of it, Horizon and Kimi always surprise us, just for a different reason...*

The more she thought about it, the less she knew what was good and what was bad, so she stopped thinking.

However, she was worried about Mary who was taking up the rear. She and Tenzou had crossed Hexagone Française just like Mitotsudaira, but...



*...Will she be okay?*

Whenever Asama glanced back at Mary, the girl did not seem to be paying attention.

She hung her head and occasionally held a hand to her cheek while ether water lilies scattered from her hair. Whenever those fell on Naruze's wings ahead of her, she would frantically apologize. It was cute how Excalibur would float worriedly around when that happened.

She did not know how to control her emotions after Tenzou's charming display that afternoon.

Mary usually seemed quite calm, but that was likely why she did not know what to do when something did get to her.

As someone who placed a lid over everything, Asama was honestly quite jealous...

"No, no, no, no."

"What is the matter, Asama-sama? You are acting crazy again."

"Huh? Why would you say 'again' there?"

*Kimi would probably have an answer to that if she was here,* thought Asama, but that crazy person was currently monitoring them from atop the hill.

Suzu, Adele, Heidi, and some others were with her. Suzu was receiving sensory data on everything from Musashi's sensors, although it was not as detailed as when she was on the bridge. She was providing them with real-time updates: **Bell:** "Trees...there are a bunch of...trees. And they're all...different shapes."

She must have been enjoying all the data on natural objects because she sounded unusually excited.

**Bell:** "And? And you know what? That one tree...um...uh...Mitotsudaira-san?"

**Silver Wolf:** "Eh? Yes, there is one in front of me. What about it?"

**Bell:** "Yes. That is...I'm not sure how to explain...but it's not a tree. It's a person."

Everyone but Mary came to a stop and Mary bumped into Naruze.

“Ah, s-sorry. You stopped so suddenly. Did something happen?”

Mitotsudaira immediately gave a shout.

“We’ve found the enemy!”

**Taki:** “Eh!? What!? Did they notice our front line!?”

**Shared:** “Um, I’m not sure how, but they noticed me! Ah, there’s a crossdresser! That’s probably the crossdressing Chancellor who was on top of the Ariake! He’s wiggling side to side, so can I target him first!?”

**Ka-K:** “Hey, Takigawa-san. It sounds like this wasn’t according to plan, so are we okay out here?”

**Taki:** “If you can handle this, then do so! Upstream covert unit, get moving!”

Mitotsudaira ejected her silver chains while sending an instruction to Suzu.

**Silver Wolf:** “Suzu! Please do a search to see if the forest below is safe!”

A gunshot was fired while everyone was still confused and it was blocked by an automatic defense barrier.

She was most worried about...

*...My king!*

She turned back and saw the crossdresser striking a Y-pose, so she decided he was probably fine. They had Asama with them, so Horizon and the other would be well defended.

Then Suzu’s response arrived.

**Bell:** “Below is...okay! There’s...someone there...but just one? That’s all.”

That would be someone from Sanada. Only they would lie in wait on their own.

So if they went down there, someone would have to fight that person. And if they could stop them, it would clear the way to the lake. So...

*...Time for a detour.*

If they jumped straight down, a few of them would be hit during the fall. Only one person was needed to fire on them with a homing spell. However, if they took a detour, there might be traps, but Mitotsudaira only had to take control of the ground and air with her silver chains. The time for covert action had ended. So...

“Silver Chains...!”

Mitotsudaira moved forward. In order to secure a detour path, she wrapped the chains around the upstream trees and crushed them.

“There...!”

She threw the crushed and felled trees into the downstream space.

*...This is a real pain.*

Naruze held Weiss Fräulein in an upright position while moving behind the trees.

She was on a downward detour in the northern upstream area.

The enemy was coming from downstream. They primarily attacked with gunfire and were quite aggressive, but they made no attempt to approach.

They were ninjas.

It was a thorough long-range attack, so when Naruze’s group of warriors moved forward...

“...!”

The enemy fell back. They did so by quite a bit without a moment’s hesitation.

Naruze wanted to poetically describe their movement as “like a flowing river”, but that was nothing but trouble for her.

*...This is not going according to plan!*

Nothing ever seemed to go according to plan. The data on the final page might crash just before submitting the doujin, the printing press might

malfunction, and a group opposed to idol worship might protest the sexual content. Those things happened all the time.

So she responded with the same irritation she did at those times.

She stuffed 120 10-yen coins into Weiss Fräulein, held it under her arm, and side stepped out from behind the tree she was using as a shield.

“Hiii...”

With that gloomy greeting, several presences moved in the distance. It was impressive how they tried to move away without even turning around. However...

*...Don't underestimate an artist's visual perception!*

She had the skill to instantly draw up the perfect shot she saw. And even without drawing out a guide line, her accuracy was far higher with her feet solidly on the ground than when in the air.

She fired.

The light of firing spells scattered at a rate of 20-per-second to the right of Weiss Fräulein.

10-yen coins were fired at the same rate. Each of those shots could punch through light armor, so they tore through the forest's trees and shook everything.

She ran out of ammo in 4 seconds. So she reloaded. And she activated another spell. While she did that, the enemy poked their heads out.

“Here.”

She had attached a heating spell to a glass water bottle at her hip, so she launched that with Weiss Fräulein.

“Honestly.”

She finished reloading the coin bullets while watching the explosion of scalding steam. She slowly moved right to follow the others while resuming her rapid-fire. She also occasionally threw one of the water bottles at her hip.

“Mitotsudaira! They're pinned in place!”

Mitotsudaira responded to Naruze's signal by throwing something into the downstream forest.

*...These tall trees I secured with the silver chains!!*

There were 12 in all. She used the silver chains to launch those lengthy objects one at a time.

Instead of bending the chain to grab them, she placed them atop the chains like a catapult to launch them. Thanks to the swinging of the chains, the tree spears flew with artillery-like speed.

She had not removed the branches. That way those leafy branches would snag on the other trees and hit the people hidden behind them.

Mitotsudaira raised her voice while swinging her arms to perform the high-speed launch.

"Go!"

The Takigawa ninjas saw the rush of trees coming.

"...Huh?"

They had had a tree or two thrown at them earlier, but they had been thrown slowly, giving them a chance to react.

But this was very different. Summer-leaved conifer trees measuring more than 20m were thrown with enough force to break through the surrounding forest. At first glance, it looked a lot like having a small transport ship ramming them.

The ninja in the lead swung a spread hand backwards.

"Scatter and retreat!"

Just as he shouted in a voice only his fellow ninjas could hear, a tree hit him.

They all saw the leaves surround him and lift him from the ground.

He was instantly engulfed by the leaves and branches.

Then the tree bounced off the ground.

There was no path in the forest, so whenever the speedy tree hit another tree, it would change direction somewhat.

“...!”

That high-speed charge swept across the forest.

And it did not end with just the one. Before the first one had ended, a second, third, and fourth joined it.

The roar was of snapping and cracking trees. The leaves and dirt accumulated on the ground were all blown away.

“Retreat...!”

Those who moved away from the lake were the lucky ones.

Those who reflexively fled downstream were pursued by the roaring wave of trees and swallowed up. The high-speed trees tore a path in the dirt as they weaved between the standing trees and their great weight and the pressure of their leafy branches caught the Takigawa ninjas who failed to escape.

They did not even have time to scream.

A fifth, sixth, and seventh were launched. And those pursued the ninjas who had escaped toward the city road.

But those who had escaped and sprinted through the dark forest heard a certain sound from the lake.

“Ship artillery fire. Finally!”

The Kanie Castle fired a physical shell along a tall parabolic arc.

It fell beyond the slope of the upstream hill.

But it did not stop there. In response to Takigawa’s barked orders, the main cannon and secondary cannons on Kanie Castle’s bow continued to fire.

“Fire like you’re trying to bring down the entire hill!”

“Takigawa-sama, they’re returning fire!”

“From the Musashi, right!?”

She looked up into the sky and saw light coming from atop the Musashi's long bow.

The enemy's god of war sniper unit had fired.

"Here it comes! Open defense barriers!"

Just as she said that, explosions of light erupted in the sky off the Kanie Castle's lake-facing starboard side.

The barriers were shattered by the shots from the Musashi.

The light loudly scattered and sprayed into the night while the bullet fragments bounced off the water of the artificial lake.

Water sprayed out like rain and Takigawa raised her voice even as it fell on her.

"Gunners, stick to physical shells! If we send all power to the defense barriers, we can survive this!"

The physical shells fired from behind the barriers took nearly vertical trajectories. The targeting was less precise, but physical shells could be fired without using much ether fuel. However...

"Takigawa-sama! I'm detecting ether light at the target location!"

Meaning...

"That is an anti-ship defense barrier!"

Mitotsudaira looked up at the light where the ship artillery was hitting in the forest.

That was a defense barrier. The one that took the hit would shatter, but several more immediately opened up below it. Asama was activating them, but her Blessings alone were not enough to cover it. It was only possible thanks to...

"My king!"

"Yeah, that was a close one."

Her king had activated his ether supply spell. It had several lines attached to

the waist hard points of Asama's shrine maiden outfit.

The noise of the shells being fired and hitting was quite loud, but Asama's dignified voice carried through it all.

"If you can raise barriers, please do so! I can give you three!"

Three shields floated into the sky below the falling metallic noise.

Immediately, an even more concentrated attack hit the sky.

"...!"

The barrage was testing the barriers. The several layers were instantly blown away, but...

"I'm adding in a strengthening spell!"

Just as Asama clapped her hands, the light grew much brighter. The number of layers being shattered was in equilibrium with the number being created, so it felt like the cacophony from the sky had grown more distant.

*...We're safe!*

Just as Mitotsudaira thought that, she heard a shout from Mary.

"Lady Mitotsudaira!"

Mitotsudaira sensed danger.

She realized why Mary had called her name.

Mary was not saying that *Mitotsudaira herself was in danger*. Mary knew her very well thanks to their trek across Hexagone Française after descending from IZUMO to pursue her mother.

So Mary knew what she cared about most.

"My king!"

The enemy's attack arrived just as she looked back.

It was a flying projectile.

She could not see it, but she sensed its pressure. It was a powerful presence



she could only describe as killer or destructive intent and it flew past her and toward her king's group.

Her hand or silver chains would not reach it in time, so...

“...!”

She kicked it from the side as it passed her by.

With a deafening sound, she felt the hit in her leg and its course was changed enough to crash into a nearby tree.

It was a shell.

*...It was fired horizontally!?*

While listening to the bursting and creaking of the giant tree, Mitotsudaira wondered why the shell had flown in along a horizontal course.

They were behind a slope, so the Kanie Castle could not directly target them.

*In that case*, she thought.

“So you can use bursts of strength rivalling your mom's, can you?”

She heard a sudden voice behind her on the left. She recognized it.

*...Kakei Juuzou!*

The sound of an artillery shot rang by her ear before she could dodge.

Mitotsudaira realized she had dodged in time.

The shot was made at nearly point-blank range. She only managed to avoid it thanks to seeing Kakei and Futayo's battle and her bestial reflexes.

She had dodged it. The flying shell had shot through the gaps between the trees behind her.

*...That was a close one!*

She knew Kakei's ninja technique. Anything he fired from his hidden hands would be fired from the target's blind spot. And out of the corner of her vision, she saw a pair of sign frames in his hands.

### <Kanie Castle: 3rd Bow Secondary Cannon: Firing Control>

If his ninja technique was functioning properly, then it meant he was using one of the Kanie Castle's secondary cannons.

*...Is that how the one was fired horizontally!?*

This was the answer to her question: he had effectively carried a ship's cannon onto the battlefield.

An attack from the side would be devastating to the others who had their defense barriers positioned overhead.

Mitotsudaira knew she had to do something about this. Especially because this enemy could move quickly. That meant only she could handle him. However...

"Mito!"

Asama's shout sounded both worried and surprised.

*...What does that mean?*

Just then, Mitotsudaira realized she was lying on the ground.

She had tripped.

*...That moron!*

Naruze swung Weiss Fräulein around below the protective umbrella of defense barriers.

The silver wolf had tripped due to the previous cannon blast. It had been fired close to her ear. While it was true she had dodged it, the vibration of the sound had shaken her inner ear.

Naruze hurriedly targeted Kakei to assist Mitotsudaira. She did not know if she would be fast enough, but something had to be done about the ninja circling behind Mitotsudaira's back.

*Honestly, ninjas are so much trouble whether they're on your side or not.*

"Mitotsudaira!"

Mitotsudaira was moving, but her sense of equilibrium was shot. The lines of her butt made a nice silhouette when she struggled to get up on her knees, so Naruze made sure to memorize the visual. Unfortunately, Kakei was circling behind her.

*...Oh, no!*

He blocked her view of Mitotsudaira's butt. A guy's butt was not what she needed right now. *You're in the way. No, that's not the point.* She raised Weiss Fräulein and, once Mitotsudaira rolled a bit out from Kakei's sights...

*"...!?"*

A shot got in Naruze's way. It came from the road to the left.

One of the Takigawa ninjas had escaped Mitotsudaira's tree onslaught and circled around to target them.

Naruze quickly raised Weiss Fräulein to protect herself. She caught the enemy bullets on the device and Mary did the same on Excalibur.

*...Ahh, this pisses me off!*

She felt like nothing was going right. If their goal was to anger her, Takigawa's unit was doing an amazing job. *Disembowel yourselves, all of you. I'm going to miss my deadline, so bow down to the printing office and commit seppuku.*

But she heard another cannon blast. Kakei had fired on Mitotsudaira.

Mitotsudaira saw it.

A definite cannon blast sounded to her right while she still could not stand back up.

It was quite close by and she was certain it would hit.

*"...!?"*

But then she heard a metallic noise and an explosion.

It was the loud sound of everything being blown away, but she was still alive.

*...What is this?*

She opened her eyes to see.

Something floated in the air amid the smoke and shrapnel to her right.

“Ex. Collbrande!!”

Tenzou had swung his hand toward the air upstream, but he now pulled it back and took a breath.

The rumbling of cannon fire continued. Some of it was supporting fire from the Musashi, but that was a bit sporadic.

**Smoking Girl:** “We got two units aboard a transport ship so we can aim from above. They have to place their defense barriers vertically and it restricts the angle of fire, so this should be a little easier now.”

“Thank you,” he said while looking at his hand. Excalibur had been there a moment before, but it had appeared worried about things on the other side. He had thrown it there thinking it was for Mary, but...

**Silver Wolf:** “You saved me, 1st Special Duty Officer!”

**10ZO:** “Eh? Mitotsudaira-dono? Not Mary-dono?”

**Scarred:** “...”

<Scarred-sama has left the chat.>

“Eh?”

“Oh, c’mon, Tenzou. That was too careless of you.”

“Why?” he asked as the group monitoring the upstream area turned back toward him.

“Tch. ...Oh, 1st Special Duty Officer, the upstream bombardment has lightened up!”

“Tch. ...Um, 1st Special Duty Officer, what detour should we take?”

“Tch. ...The Kanie Castle seems to be aiming all its cannons upstream.”

“Wh-why did you all preface your reports like that!?”

*This is hardly new, but I really don’t get girls,* he thought. But then Gin raised

her head.

“Master Muneshige.”

“Judge. ...1st Special Duty Officer, have you noticed?”

He had. They were surrounded.

The enemy was still a good distance away, but they were closing in and making no attempt to hide their footsteps.

“A group of automatons!?”

Gin sensed something odd in the enemy’s footsteps.

This was not her first time fighting automatons, but there was still something strange about how they were stepping.

*...They are not measuring the distance.*

She could see the enemy in the forest, in the night, and in the darkness.

“...Trees!?”

They used wooden parts, but there were so many of them. A quick estimate told her their numbers broke a thousand. And they formed several ranks.

The Musashi warriors stepped back in shock and Gin gestured for them to fall back further. And...

“Arcabuz Cruz!”

She only pulled the right one from the dual pitch space because the other had not been repaired since the Sanada battle. But she fired as soon as it was spatially ejected.

At a distance of 20 meters, she tore through the dolls straight ahead of her.

A moment later, flames rose from the broken dolls. With a roar, something was scattered throughout the wind.

“Explosion spells!”

Just as she shouted that, the enemy took unified action. They thrust their hands forward and raced toward the Musashi group as if to grab at them.

They would not miss at this range, so Gin exchanged a glance with Muneshige. And...

“Vice Chancellor! Take care of the Vice President and the others!”

After saying that, Gin saw someone jumping overhead.

It was the Vice Chancellor she had just spoken to and the girl was charging toward the approaching enemy.

*...That idiot!*

Gin was enraged, but she restrained herself by only aiming Arcabuz Cruz at the center of Futayo’s back and pulling the spell-control trigger 5 times with the safety still on. Muneshige laughed next to her.

“Gin, that was the adult thing to do.”

“Master Muneshige, this is not the kind of adult I want to be!”

“The enemy!” shouted Futayo. “The enemy is coming!!”

Gin hurriedly responded to the enemy.

# Chapter 68: Hunter of the Hunting Ground

# 第六十八章

## 『狩場の狩人』



頼むわ  
神様  
配点 (オッケオッケ)



*I'm counting on you*

*God*

### **Point Allocation (Okay, Okay)**

As soon as Mitotsudaira recovered, she engaged Kakei in combat.

The sporadic shellfire continued. And those attacks primarily fell along the detour routes.

*...He doesn't intend to let us get down there safely, does he!?*

Everyone was hidden behind the lakeside slope. Asama placed defense barriers overhead and the warriors' barriers protected them horizontally. Also...

"Suzu-san is sending us the target locations!"

Asama's voice was accompanied by several sign frames appearing above the ground. They all said <Hit?> in Suzu's handwriting. A bar graph scale stood up from them to provide the time the shell would arrive.

*...That's enough for me!*

With Excalibur in hand, Mitotsudaira moved her legs. And the enemy...

"Not bad!"

He used high-speed movements to try to capture her. But she sent her strength to her toe tips.

"Here I go!"

She pursued him. A wolf would not flee. Nor would she let her prey escape. Those were her rules.

Kakei's movements were made up of rapid slides and turns. She pursued his curving motion with continual jumps while she ran between the predicted artillery target locations.

Using her whole body felt great. She contracted and extended her body while occasionally doing it with just one leg.

*...I need to move just a little faster!*

The enemy continued firing the cannon. The sound rang in her ears, but the wolf turned her heels compactly to the right and accelerated.

The enemy was to the right. He was already trying to move behind her on that side, so...

“—————”

She swung her right silver chain in midair. She immediately had it grab a tree to turn her around.

That flipped her vision to the left just as Kakei jumped into view there.

“Oops.”

He immediately spun himself around and came to a stop. A cannon blast targeted her as she landed. And it came from behind her on the left.

She had expected this, so she forcibly jumped leftward.

The shell passed very close to the right side of her head. She felt the heat in her hair and the opposite trees were felled by the hit by the time she felt the wind.

The blast arrived a moment later. She tilted her head to avoid the expanding noise. And when she faced forward and to the left, she saw Kakei spinning his body.

She went for it.

*...I made it!*

She leaped in front of him.

That was safe ground. Kakei's shots arrived from his blind spots. If she stood in front of him, he would be forced to fire from behind her.

That would mean firing directly toward himself, so he could not do it. So if she simply moved forward...

*...No!*

Mitotsudaira launched herself left.

A blind spot attack had appeared behind her.

*That's crazy, thought Mitotsudaira. Is he not afraid of hitting himself?*

But she heard a certain sound.

"Tch."

Kakei clicked his tongue.

He was blaming himself for failing to finish her off. So...

*...He lured me there, knowing what it would mean!?*

But what would he do about the shell she had dodged? As soon as the question occurred to her, she saw the answer.

Something flew in from behind her on the left: a second shell.

The new one crashed into the side of one she had dodged.

"..."

Sparks erupted before her eyes.

Kakei dodged to the right while the destructive shockwave hit the left of his back.

*...What choice do I have!?*

He worked to ensure he wouldn't have to conclude he had "screwed up". He had put a fair amount of effort into luring her in like that.

*I mean, fighting the Reine des Garous's daughter is no joke. Come to think of it, isn't this like being one step before the final boss? She's at least the major midgame boss. I'm doing the best I can on my own here, but...*

*...There's no easy way to deal with her...*

He had just gotten a definite hit in on her.

He had struck her with the noise of the explosion.

Like before, it should have affected her inner ear too badly for her to move.

"But I guess it isn't that easy!"

When he spun around with a turning slide, he saw a silver form there.

It was the wolf.

As she launched her entire body toward him, there were scorch marks on her uniform, but she was unharmed herself.

The explosion had not affected her. But why not?

*...The chains!*

Mitotsudaira's burst of acceleration sent the cold sweat flying from her back.

*...That was way too close!*

The tree she had grabbed with a chain when approaching Kakei had saved her from the explosion.

She had reflexively pulled herself toward the tree held by the silver chain. That had only moved her about a meter, but she had also raised Excalibur so that her ears had processed the blast as no more than a loud noise.

And she had learned a new trick.

It was a movement technique she could use to corner Kakei. She would have to use it without any practice, but...

"Here goes!"

While Suzu stood on the hill and used the Musashi to monitor the situation in the forest, she questioned the wolf's movement.

*...Eh?*

Mitotsudaira's movements were odd.

Before now, she had been moving around with accelerated leaps that felt like teleportation.

But those bursts of acceleration had a starting point and an ending point connected by a straight line. While observing her from above, Suzu was generally able to predict the routes she was taking. But now...

*...Wh-where is she?*

She could not predict the wolf's movements. She would jump at a different angle mid-leap and move in swinging curves. The oddest movements of all were the ones that could only be seen as a change of direction in midair. But...

"Umm."

Suzu could not just proclaim that Mitotsudaira was acting weird, so she increased the resolution of her senses. She touched the model display controls and upped the magnification of the sensory data sent from the Musashi.

Her senses immediately detected something moving rapidly around Mitotsudaira. It was...

"The silver chains...!"

Kakei realized this was a lot of trouble.

The enemy had increased her mobility. And not with simple speed; it was her turning.

She used her chains.

The silver wolf's two chains had grabbed the forest's trees. When he tried to avoid her charges, the chains would pursue him. And when he dodged that...

"She grabs a tree with the chain to swing herself around!?"

The wolf pulled herself toward the tree held by the chain.

This was indeed a lot of trouble. She could grab a tree to change direction in midair and, if he tried to escape with a turning slide, she would swing herself around a tree liked a pendulum. And...

*...She can grab the tree to move up!?*

She could easily transform a horizontal charge into upward movement.

Kakei smiled bitterly at how he quickly fell back because he could not respond to that sudden vertical movement.

*...I look pretty pathetic here.*

This was exactly the kind of feint that a ninja was supposed to use against their enemy.

But those bursts of speed and directional changes allowed the color silver to jump every which way in pursuit of him.

She was a pack of wolves.

*I see*, thought Kakei. *The forest is a beast's home ground*. And it was also night.

*...The home ground of nonhumans!*

The enemy then began snapping at him with a fang named Excalibur.

She was closing in on him. He was too preoccupied with dodging to lure her in. However...

"I do have a weapon of resistance!"

This battle was the 2nd Siege of Ueda.

He had to produce results. So he took action. He turned to face the enemy while falling back to the left.

"Come, silver wolf!"

He was too preoccupied, but he lured her in regardless.

Mitotsudaira was running.

The enemy was falling back to her right.

He was 15 meters away. She knew she could catch up and she was indeed closing in. So...

"...!"

Despite the cannon fire, she jumped to the right to further close in on Kakei.

Another shell flew in from the left. He intended to drive her rightward as she advanced on him.

She refused to allow any more distance between them.

She threw a silver chain into the air to her right. It grabbed a tree up ahead in that direction, so she pulled herself toward it.

That brought her closer to Kakei. And as soon as she moved forward, Kakei fired again.

This shell targeted her face from the rear left. That was a risky position for moving forward to dodge.

So she let the chain go slack to decelerate in midair.

The shell passed right in front of her. And after that slight lapse in speed...

*...Silver chain!*

Just as it started to pull her forward once more, she heard a cannon blast.

It was targeting her, but it was not coming from behind or to either side.

*...Up ahead!?*

That was not one of Kakei's blind spots. It was an impossible shot.

Kakei fired a decisive shot from dead ahead.

*...Now what'll you do!?*

There was a trick behind this shot.

That trick was the shot fired from the side just before. By allowing it to pass in front of the enemy's eyes, it forcibly created a blind spot for both of them that was just enough for a single shell.

The enemy had been pursued from behind by the shells this whole time, but this counterattack suddenly came from the front. And it targeted the center of her body. She would not escape unscathed even if she guarded with Excalibur.

"Hit her...!"

Kakei prayed. He prayed for his god's blessing to reach the blind spot behind the enemy.

Even after the main attack from the front, he fired more and more shells at the wolf from behind.

One of the ones behind her would catch up even if she tried to dodge.

He would corner the wolf and finish her off fair and square.

A moment later, he saw something.

The wolf had accelerated toward him.

Mitotsudaira gave a strong tug on the chain in her right hand.

And just as the approaching shell was going to hit her, she relaxed her right arm to decelerate.

*...I made it in time!*

Just as the silver chain went slack, she sent her hand up and to the right.

She saw something there: a shell.

Kakei had fired it from the rear left to create a blind spot. It was the one she had just dodged.

Raising her right arm sent the silver chain up toward the shell's path.

"..."

It hit. The silver chain's loop caught on the shell.

*...How about this!?*

It exploded.

Kakei saw a single movement.

The wolf had hit his shell with her chain.

As a result, the chain detonated the shell and the blast knocked the wolf away. Also, the chain broke and...

"She dodged it!?"

Just as the wolf was blasted outside his view, the shell shot from the front collided with the barrage of shells pursuing her from behind.

This produced a great roar, but Kakei turned around to the left.



The nighttime forest was there. And unlike his immediate surroundings which had lost its trees due to the shellfire, that forest was wrapped in deep darkness.

In that darkness, a single large tree was straining. The trunk vibrated and the leafy branches shook from bottom to top.

But he could not see anyone in front of that large tree in the darkness.

He reflexively jumped to the right and he looked to the left while distancing himself from the tree.

The enemy appeared in his vision there.

A single presence dropped down from the sky ahead and to the left.

The fall was accompanied by the sound of a wildly swinging chain.

It was the wolf.

The silver wolf's shoulders rose and fell as she turned around with a broken chain and Excalibur in her right hand.

Takei had a thought when their eyes met: *Have I cornered her, or has she cornered me?*

*...Now that's a question.*

He did not know. But he was extremely exhausted as well. He was not sure he could escape even if he used his skilled footwork here.

Shells from the Kanie Castle were falling all around them. The wolf walked forward within that din, so Takei...

"Here goes."

He launched a shell of his own.

He targeted it at the center of her back, which meant it also targeted him.

But a question arose as soon as he sent the command to fire.

*...Huh?*

It had not fired.

*What is going on?* wondered Kakei.

He did not understand why his shell had failed to fire, but some kind of misunderstanding was a possibility. So he used his remote control for the fire controls to fire again. However...

“—————”

There was no response. It failed. No...

*...Huh?*

He did hear something. He heard a secondary cannon fire exactly as he sent the command.

It was firing, but his god's blessing had not sent it into the blind spot.

*...Has my god forsaken me?*

He was not kind enough with himself to just accept defeat in that case. However...

“How could this-...?”

It hit him just as he muttered the word “happen”. The silver wolf in front of him had come to a stop.

She was not moving. No, that was not it. She had performed a certain trick.

“Erasing the blind spot!”

Mitotsudaira did not nod at Kakei's words. She simply advanced.

“...”

She occasionally swayed her body. It was an instantaneous thing that caused her hair to bounce a bit.

*...I see.*

There was *something* around them here.

The forest was a comfortable space for ether and ley lines and her Loup-Garou blood allowed her to sense this presence.

A great presence surrounded her and Kakei while watching over the battle. But unfortunately, it took Kakei's side and helped him attack her from his blind spots. So...

"Oh."

Mitotsudaira swayed while walking and performed a light shake while sending her gaze around.

She blurred the definition of the blind spot created by her body.

By shaking her hair, he could see through the gaps and by turning her body sideways he could see behind her.

Then she just had to match her movements to the timing of the shells. Not when Kakei pulled the trigger, but when the shell was launched toward her.

She knew the timing after listening to the sound so many times and watching Futayo's battle with him before.

The attack from directly ahead had helped most of all. That had been her enemy's special attack, but it had also allowed her to observe the timing of the blind spot shot with both her eyes and ears. So...

"Now, then."

She moved forward.

And Kakei moved too.

He performed a turning slide. It was a beautifully ordered movement. It may have been the most perfectly executed one he had done yet.

Perhaps that was because he had just received a short breather after all that constant movement. He swung his relaxed body around to arrive behind her.

But Mitotsudaira moved.

Even if he arrived behind her, she still knew the timing to erase his blind spot.

The wolf eliminated the enemy's attack and turned toward him with a burst of acceleration.

And she saw something there.

Kakei had drawn his guns. He held the dark metal devices in his hands.

“God,” he said. “I’m gonna do my damndest.”

For Mitotsudaira, the bullets did not come from Kakei’s blind spot. And when a tremor ran through his body...

“———!”

He moved forward. A pair of gunshots immediately followed.

Mitotsudaira twisted her body and dodged the incoming bullets.

“...!”

She gasped at how accurate the shots were.

Too-accurate shots were said to be easier to dodge, but this was on another level entirely. The bullets traveled along such a pure trajectory that she briefly thought she was being absorbed by those twin lines.

Only after suppressing the urge to move into their path did she move around.

But this was different from before. He did not run from her.

He stayed in constant motion to always remain in front of her and she swung Excalibur to respond to the gunfire.

Sparks flew, their shoulders collided, and they slipped past each other.

His movement was impressive.

He was at least on Noamasa’s level, if not higher. Given the speed and mobility, he had to be better.

At any rate, she controlled her speed just before striking at empty air.

She used a burst of speed that sent her hair fluttering behind her.

“Ohh!”

She pursued him.

A series of movements occurred in an instant.

Within those turns and accelerations, the wolf circled behind Kakei on the left.

He responded by turning to the left.

He first turned his head toward the wolf and fired from his left gun.

The bullet flew toward the silver wolf's right chest, but just before it hit, the wolf raised her right arm and sent her body to the left.

She held Excalibur in her right hand and swung it wide to the left in order to slice into Kakei's back.

He dodged that by bending back.

A moment later, a bullet shot past the wolf's unguarded right side.

She had just swung Excalibur up to the left and tilted her body to the left.

As Kakei straightened up again, she was right in front of him while trying to move to the right.

He would not let her escape. He followed her acceleration. Just as she used a burst of speed...

"No more prayers!"

He swung his body to the right to follow. And he swung his right arm down to aim the handgun at the wolf's right temple.

"I'll do it!"

His mouth twisted to either side and he sounded on the verge of tears as he raised his voice.

"I'll do it myself!"

He fired as if making a downwards blow.

Asama saw Mitotsudaira spin around.

Since she had swung Excalibur to the left, she had nearly overbalanced to that side. She had avoided that by jumping away to the left, but the enemy was pursuing her.

*...And he fired...*

He shot down at her right temple while she leaned to the left.

But then Mitotsudaira unleashed a burst of movement.

She did not dodge. She performed a side flip right there.

She did not place her hands on the ground for a cartwheel. She made an instantaneous midair side flip with her head as the pivot point.

The gunshot rang out, but the bullet missed her face. Asama distinctly heard it hit the ground.

And the next thing she saw was Mitotsudaira landing and...

“Mito!”

She saw Kakei aiming his left handgun at her face.

A gunshot rang out.

Kakei saw the result for himself.

Someone had taken a bullet between the eyes.

But it was not the wolf.

It was him.

The wolf had raised Excalibur and the crushed bullet was pasted to the reflection of his face there.

The silver wolf must have held the large sword close and used it to protect her in midair. That explained why she had gone for a midair side flip instead of a simpler cartwheel. If she had placed her hands on the ground, she could not have defended herself soon enough.

“What’s your deal?”

Kakei spoke to his own face reflected in the mirror-like blade.

“Why do you look so relieved?”

A moment later, Excalibur flipped around. The wolf had pulled back her elbow

and raised the weapon in preparation to attack.

Kakei saw the enemy, so he aimed his two guns and fired.

But she twisted her body and slipped between the two shots.

She charged straight toward him with Excalibur raised up and back. He fell back, but...

“...!”

He was too slow.

For a brief moment, he saw the black sky. The very next moment, he felt something piercing his right chest while he was slammed into a tree behind him.

Tenzou heard one sound vanish from the distant artillery hits.

He no longer heard the handgun gunfire that had started a bit ago. And instead...

*...Oh?*

He heard an out-of-place cheer.

The shellfire was still underway, but the overall atmosphere must have changed. He heard the loud sounds of Far Eastern rifles and of Naruze firing. And on his end of things...

“Ga-chan sure is having fun,” commented Naito while holding Schwarz Fräulein below her arm and unleashing a stream of gunfire.

Next to her, Gin was intermittently sending shells to their surroundings. However...

*...There are too many of them!*

The enemy automatons were approaching in an arc shape measuring 30 meters across.

They moved at a run, but there were so many of them. They kept a thickness of 8 rows deep and they never seemed to thin out.

And the enemy used their numbers to continually close in. That made it easy to hit them, but...

*...We can't avoid this fight.*

The automatons were climbing up the very detour Tenzou's group hoped to use to get down.

And the enemy had reinforcements.

**10ZO:** "Neshinbara-dono! Could you ask Houjou for detailed information on any automaton supplies sent to Sanada!?"

**Novice:** "Oh, we already received a report on that: 'This is the end for Houjou, so we gave them all of the spare parts we no longer need. Good luck. I could defeat them all without breaking a sweat.' "

**10ZO:** "Why did they have to do that!?"

Didn't that give the enemy near-unlimited numbers? However...

**Bell:** "Tenzou-kun! Watch out...!"

Just as Suzu's warning arrived, the automatons in front of him exploded.

It was obvious what had happened. They had not self-destructed, but it was not an attack from the Musashi side either.

"Is the Kanie Castle firing on us!?"

Suzu increased the magnification of the model to pick up the Kanie Castle's actions.

Before, it had been focusing its shellfire on the upstream direction. The Musashi had responded by returning firing on the upstream edge of the Kanie Castle: the bow. However...

*...The Kanie Castle has focused its defense barriers on the bow.*

The transport ship carrying the gunner gods of war was moving into airspace giving them a shot at the bow.

The Kanie Castle must have noticed because its aft cannons suddenly began



firing in the downstream direction.

The shells were scattered along the detour route down to the lower part of the forest.

*...Is it not letting them down? Or is it...not letting them back to the road?*

Either way, they were held in place.

**Hori-ko:** “This is dangerous. Fine, then. I will fire Lype Katathlipse downstream to clean everything up quite nicely.”

**10ZO:** “Please don’t clean us up too!”

**Gold Mar:** “I can fly out of the way, so can you tell me when you’re going to shoot it?”

The scary part was not knowing which of those suggestions she would accept. But...

**Hori-ko:** “That said, there are far too many trees piled up to go rescue the downstream team. I really think sending any help would not be possible.”

**Silver Wolf:** “You’re saying it’s my fault, aren’t you!? Aren’t you!?”

**Wise Sister:** “Hey, Asama, why don’t you send Tenzou’s team a barrier? They’re in range, aren’t they?”

**Asama:** “That’s true. I will send one defense barrier to Tenzou-kun! Can you catch it, Tenzou-kun!? Hold your arms up like this. Um, and spread them upwards at about 20 degrees.”

**10ZO:** “Y-you don’t have to be so specific!”

Suzu was worried about this, but she noticed something while lining up the enemy models.

*...Huh?*

There was a chance she was mistaken since she was blind, but it seemed odd to her.

But there was one way of proving that it was odd.

**Bell:** “The number of enemies...is the same?”

“Huh?”

Adele tilted her head next to Suzu. She started up a targeting spell and locked onto all the enemy models. And after checking the enemy reinforcements too...

“Oh, you’re right! There are 1600 of them! The number is fixed!”

The number of automatons was indeed staying at a set level.

“But.” Adele turned toward Suzu. “What does that mean? If they just have to crush us, wouldn’t it make sense to send the whole group at once?”

“Heh heh. I think I know what this is about.” A pleasant aroma and something soft pressed against Suzu’s back. “Suzu, you tell them the enemy is being remotely controlled in some way. And the control method has an upper limit of 1600 units at once. In other words...”

“Someone nearby...is controlling...them.”

They were somewhere out there. And somewhere with a view of the battlefield. Suzu was blind, so she was not confident she could pinpoint a location “with a good view”. But...

**Bell:** “T-Tenzou-kun...are you listening?”

There was one place that always gave an advantage to sensory systems.

**Bell:** “The enemy must be...somewhere high...and without any obstacles!”

Tenzou heard Suzu while he held the defense barrier overhead.

*...Somewhere high and without any obstacles!?*

He looked back over his shoulder.

The dirt hill that blocked the view of the Kanie Castle was about 2 meters tall. There were no trees growing on top and only the wind blew through there, but there was no sign of anyone there.

*...In that case...*

*Are they at the top of a nearby tree?* he wondered just as the warrior unit

arrived to take shelter below his defense barrier. The girl in the lead raised a hand in greeting.

“Thanks for the help, 1st Special Duty Officer!”

The instant he heard that, he jumped away from the female student.

“Imposter!”

*This isn't right*, thought Tenzou.

He could not trust this warrior girl who had fled right in front of him.

*...She didn't click her tongue or insult me even once!*

He had received that sort of response 100% of the time on this mission, but it was absent here.

So this was a disguise. And if she was one of the Sanada Ten Braves with a connection to automatons...

“Mochizuki Yukitada...!”

“So you noticed.”

The girl's mouth changed shape. Both sides rose to form a crescent moon. This was a mere reaction, not a smile from the heart. And...

*...Oh, no!*

His pose holding up the defense barrier was a problem.

He tried to escape, but his upwards-stretching pose kept him from getting much speed with his first step.

“Excuse me.”

Mochizuki's tackle hit him in the gut.

Masazumi did not really understand what had happened.

She simply saw a female student perform a flip and push Crossunite to the ground, which caused the defense barrier to hit the ground and shatter.

*...Who would've thought someone else has tastes as odd as Mary...*

It did look like Crossunite had hit the ground headfirst, but more importantly...

**Asama:** “Um, it looks like you lost your defense barrier, so did something happen!?”

**Vice President:** “Eh? Well, a girl kind of jumped into Crossunite’s arms.”

**Silver Wolf:** “Eh? W-wait, Tomo! Tomo! Get Mary back into the chat!”

**<Scarred-sama has been forced into the chat: Confirmed>**

**Scarred:** “Hm? Um, do you need something?”

*Hm*, thought Masazumi as she described the situation before her eyes.

**Vice President:** “Well, a girl just pushed Crossunite to the ground and has mounted him.”

“Eh?”

Mary had no idea what was happening.

*...Pushed him to the ground? Mounted him?*

“U-u-u-um, i-is it some kind of sport?”

“Yes, I suppose you can interpret it that way. And when mounting is involved, they sometimes use horse riding equipment which can be a real pain to draw.”

Naruze said that while taking some notes with one hand and firing Weiss Fräulein with the other, but Mary had no idea what she meant.

However, Horizon turned toward her to explain.

“Pushing someone to the ground is an ancient Far Eastern sport used for confessing one’s love.”

“Confessing one’s love...?”

“Judge. They face each other, the Shonosuke Kimura referee shouts ‘Hakkeyoi!’ and ‘Nokotta!’ at them, they embrace, and whichever one is pushed to the ground loses. The tradition is to start by sprinkling salt if you wish to

reject the confession. In some cases, the winner is given some consolation money from the referee. And since the goal is to have the two bound by marriage, the final match of the day is known as the Musubi no Ichiban, or #1 Binding.”

There was so much to learn about the Far East.

But now she knew what was happening over there.

“U-um, so since Master Tenzou was pushed to the ground...”

“Judge. I have determined this girl is confessing her love to him.”

“———”

Mary was dumbfounded. She had hesitated yet had her emotions leak out so much that afternoon.

*...D-did I feel too distant to Master Tenzou?*

*No, she decided. This is something that girl forcibly did to him.*

**Scarred:** “M-Master Tenzou hasn’t *accepted*, has he?”

**Gold Mar:** “Well, I guess you would say the girl thrust her hips between his legs and he thrust back up at her?”

Naito’s words sent a stir through everyone.

They all exchanged a glance and Urquiaga finally spoke quietly.

“So...we’ve lost Tenzou.”

“Why doesn’t that idiot do that stuff when he’s with us?”

“He does have a way of getting ahead of everyone else...”

Mary was not sure what they meant, but the image she got in her mind from Naito’s description seemed to have the male and female roles reversed.

But then...

**Vice President:** “Oh, sorry. Crossunite must have rejected her because she just drew a blade.”

Gin saw the scene play out while she fought back against the automatons.

The Musashi girl had the 1st Special Duty Officer in the mounted position while she raised a short sword.

She held his right side in place with her knee and he pushed her arm back with his left arm, but...

“Master Muneshige! What is happening!?”

“Judge. Given Lady Mary’s circumstances, I would guess this is an assassin from England.”

“Why does that incorrect theory sound so convincing!?” protested the 1st Special Duty Officer.

But the girl spoke while pushing down the hand holding the short sword.

“I will not ask that you stop moving, but I will ask that you stop your attack on us.”

She shook her head, causing her hair to fall away and a few objects to peel off of her face. And below that...

“Sanada’s Mochizuki!”

“Testament. I am here tonight to cause damage to all of you.”

Something happened just as she said that.

Several dozen shell target markers appeared at their feet.

**Bell:** “Downstream...team! Watch...out!”

They did not need to be told. But they had little room to escape with the wall created by the enemy automatons.

The Musashi Vice Chancellor, who was attacking the enemy to the right, sprang backwards.

“Masazumi!”

That nimble girl made a good decision when she picked up that VIP. Meanwhile...

“Gin, in the worst case, we will break open a path through the enemy

formation.”

That was the Muneshige she knew and loved. She just about voiced her joy out loud, but she resisted. And after calming her breathing...

“Judge. ...Then let us observe the situation while avoiding the bombardment.”

The shells arrived just as she said that.

Masazumi was lifted up by Futayo.

She had expected to be held under the other girl’s arm, but she had instead been placed over her shoulder. Futayo must not have had the time to spare, so she treated Masazumi like luggage.

While draped over that shoulder, she could see the ground right in front of her.

Mukai’s shell target markers floated above the ground all around them.

*That’s an awful lot*, she thought while Futayo accelerated. And Futayo used the time differences between hits to select a safe location.

*...Whoa!*

The first hit arrived immediately afterwards.

The sound was more breaking metal than explosive boom and the wind burst into the sky. But it did not end with that one. Masazumi heard more objects falling from above.

“...!”

And the blasts continued.

Masazumi saw the destruction of the bombing.

Noise, shockwaves, and all sorts of wind rushed at her from below.

Directions felt entirely meaningless.

And it all kept happening. The sound struck her body and the ground flew up to hit her as pebbles. She wondered what was happening to her body, but...

*...Eh?*

Something was off about the scene around her.

Moment by moment, the scene was changing, spinning, and moving like she was watching a video with frames missing.

Futayo was dodging faster than Masazumi's eyes could keep up. But the next thing she knew, she was constantly surrounded by wind and occasionally hit by pebbles, but the noise was no longer hitting her as hard.

*...Is that just how amazing Futayo is?*

She also saw the colors red and white pass by at times. Those had to be the Tachibana Couple who continued to tear into the automatons even now.

*They're all amazing,* she decided just before realizing something.

The arm and hand Futayo had around her thighs were squeezing her pretty tight.

She saw Futayo's usual expressionless face with the eyebrows raised just a bit more than usual, but...

"————"

For some reason, that put her at ease. Because she had seen that same expression back when she lived in Mikawa.

*That shows how seriously she's taking this,* thought Masazumi while relaxing from her relief in Futayo. When she did, Futayo's arm held her even more tightly. That caused some pain, but it had to be a sign of just how dangerous this was. Besides, Masazumi could not hope to match Futayo's strength, so protesting now would accomplish nothing. Also, Futayo suddenly spun around.

"————"

She turned toward Crossunite within the falling and collisions.

Mochizuki deflected his arm and began to swing down her blade.

Tenzou saw the blade swinging down within the falling bombardment.



He used his left arm to defend and tried to tilt his back out of the way, but...

*...What is with this automaton!?*

Mochizuki's legs had grown longer. Instead of the standard human size, her knees had grown to cover the length between the bottom of his hips and his armpits.

She must have disconnected the joints and added an extra bone in between. Her pelvis had also split apart to hold the bottom of his hips with vise-like strength.

Tenzou looked up toward heaven while essentially trapped in a coffin.

He saw light. It was the short sword Mochizuki was swinging down at him. And a thought occurred to him when he saw it.

*...Well done!*

This whole time, this enemy had skipped any unnecessary talk and immediately moved to finish him off. As a result...

*...The final bosses in Neshinbara-dono's books always give a long speech about their grievances and lose their chance to finish off their enemy, but that isn't how it works in the real world!*

But a moment later, a horizontal line of cutting reached Mochizuki's body.

It was a direct hit.

Immediately after using Tonbo Spare, Futayo spun around and dodged a falling shell.

Her cutting power had hit the enemy. However...

"It did not finish the job!"

She looked back to see Mochizuki moving.

Her chest was split, her upper stomach was damaged, her right upper arm motor was cut, and the front of her internal systems was damaged, but...

*...Just before I targeted her, she removed her non-structural parts and moved*

*them forward, didn't she!?*

She had not been cut. Just nicked. It was not a perfect slice, but it had supplied an impact. However...

"The other day, I healed Kakei-sama after he was hit by that attack."

The enemy knew what kind of technique Futayo used.

So just before Tonbo Spare activated, she had moved her unnecessary parts forward as a shield. And she had detached them so the impact would be diverted around her.

It was a lot like Celestial Dragon Sasuke's armor. His had been fixed in place, but it had scattered and negated Tonbo Spare's cutting. Mochizuki had recreated that scattering system by physically disassembling herself.

And Mochizuki took a certain pose. She raised her short sword to guard herself.

She did not kill the ninja. No, she had chosen to protect herself for a few moments instead of taking action and being stopped in the same way again. So...

"A shell!?"

A shell target marker appeared below the ninja and Mochizuki.

"I have an automaton body, so I do not fear destruction."

A moment later, the bar graph showing the shell's arrival time began to shrink at an accelerated rate.

The shell had begun to fall.

Mitotsudaira threw Excalibur downstream.

*...1st Special Duty Officer!*

He had sent it to her, so she had to return it so it could save its master. She used a rising side throw.

"Eh?"

Except Excalibur slipped from her hand and flew in a straight diagonal line before stabbing into the ground to her right.

It loudly bit into the dirt and everyone froze in place.

After a moment, everyone sighed and Naruze spoke for them all.

“You screwed up bad this time, Mitotsudaira.”

“N-no, I didn’t! E-Excalibur moved on its own.”

“Now she’s making excuses...”

“W-wait, let’s review what happened! So calm down, everyone!”

“Hold on!”

The crossdresser stepped forward and placed a hand on her shoulder.

“My king!”

“Everybody makes mistakes! Right, Nate!?”

“You’re not helping!”

But she did see something over his shoulder.

Excalibur was floating there after extracting itself from the ground. And the other Excalibur had joined it.

*...Eh?*

It all happened in front of Mary. The Excalibur she had held and the one that had stabbed into the ground in front of her both floated up and lightly swayed.

Then the two Excaliburs solidly connected together.

The combined sword presented its hilt to Mary.

It was clearly telling her to use it.

And Mitotsudaira saw a divine transmission from Masazumi.

**Vice President:** “The enemy is about to get Crossunite!”

Mary immediately took action. She grabbed Excalibur’s hilt and raised it to waist height.

“Master Tenzou...!”

Mitotsudaira saw light gather in Excalibur's blade.

She had seen that glowing blade once before: when Mary had used it at the end of the Armada battle.

"Get down, everyone!"

When Mary swung it, a blade of light measuring more than a kilometer long sliced through everything in its path.

"Get down!"

Gin shouted that warning when she saw Excalibur's light chopping down all the trees in the forest on its way toward them.

But even as everyone else got down, Futayo alone remained standing.

"Hm? Gin-dono, what are you saying I should do?"

"Get down!!"

But Futayo must have decided it was too late for that because she jumped over the glowing sword.

Gin watched as the girl jumped straight up and tucked her heels up against her butt to clear the blade like she was jumping rope.

*...She's insane!*

And beyond Futayo, Mochizuki was still pinning Tenzou down.

"...!!"

She could not dodge. She had already fixed her skeletal frame in place to keep the ninja from moving, so the slash hit her.

She split apart just below her chest.

Mary did not really understand what she had done.

She had fallen back onto her butt and she looked down at Excalibur in her hands, but there was no more light in its blade.

*...U-um, what was that?*

It had been a bit weaker than the attack during the Armada battle. The issue was with the ether supply to the sword, but...

**Gold Mar:** “How did that work?”

**Asama:** “As far as I can see, there is no ether stored up inside Excalibur.”

Mary could see that too. And it had been the same before.

The Excalibur she held in her hands was no more than a blade. And...

“Ah.”

It split in two. Both swords floated in the air and took their positions at her hips.

Everything was back to normal.

But then what had that attack been?

**Wise Sister:** “Would that be her special attack: the Master Tenzou Love Love Homerun?”

*Is that what it looked like?* she thought with a blush. And...

**Me:** “Won’t we find out how it works next time Tenzou’s in trouble?”

**10ZO:** “C-can we find a safer way to investigate it!?”

Mary honestly did not understand it herself, but she felt relieved when she saw that he was safe.

She had not lost him.

Futayo could see the entire forest had been sliced through and the trees felled, she could see the automatons had all split apart and broken, and she could see...

“Gin-dono, shouldn’t you get up?”

“Wh-what kind of moron would jump out of the way!? What if the blade had come to a stop or altered its trajectory!?”

*Hm, she is angry with me.* But the shells were still falling from the sky. And...

“1st Special Duty Officer!”

“J-judge!”

After pulling himself out from below the automaton’s lower body, the ninja stood up and opened a defense barrier in the sky.

They now had a roof. That left one other issue.

“Mochizuki, do you surrender?” asked Futayo.

The automaton’s body lay collapsed in front of the lake side of the slope.

It was just the upper body from the chest on up. Her right arm had also been severed.

“You cannot move, can you? Then I will secure you.”

“Do you really think you can do this?” quietly asked Mochizuki before closing her eyes. “I leave this with you.”

Futayo did not understand what she meant, but she was given an answer a beat later.

A tremor came from the ground behind her where the trees were falling.

“Just as there are many depressions where the water was removed, this area has many underground waterways. I sent my hair down one of those. So,” said Mochizuki. “How would you like to be dragged down to the underworld with me?”

Several explosions followed. They were much shallower than the previous tremor and they seemed to draw a straight line connecting downstream and upstream through the forest.

“...!?”

The earth shifted.

Everything below their feet moved toward the lake. Futayo felt a brief floating sensation.

“Kh...!”

And then the entire forest collapsed toward the ground below.

# **Chapter 69: Affirmer in the Depths of Emotion**



## 第六十九章

### 『感情底の肯定者』



な、何ですか  
この悪意のある  
アングルは……！  
配点（照れ隠し）

*Wh-what is*

*This malicious*

*Angle!?*

### **Point Allocation (Hiding Her Embarrassment)**

Suzu reflexively covered her ears.

The ground was collapsing. The cacophony of dirt and stones colliding and sparking was far too loud and it sent pain to her perception more than her ears.

She panicked at the thought of being unable to grasp what was happening if she kept listening.

Her pulse immediately quickened and something like a breath rose from the depths of her chest, so she closed off her senses just once.

She covered her ears and stepped back.

“Don’t worry. Heh heh. Here is a supporting cushion from the path of wicked women.”

“K-Kimi-chan?”

“Heh heh. Nope, this is Adele! But I am Adele from the world of dreams, so I actually have boobs.”

“I-I’ve never said I dream about that! Even if I do!”

Adele’s excessive honesty was sometimes a source of worry.

But the sensory data arriving through Noise Neighbor was gradually quieting down.

Suzu quickly waved her hands around to erase the nearby models because the scene had been completely transformed from a few seconds earlier.

The forest’s trees had been felled by Mary’s Master Tenzou Love Love Homerun.

*...And the forest itself has...fallen 20 meters...toward the lake?*

She could tell a steep slope had formed there. And that the hardness and

distribution of the crust had created protrusions and depressions. However...

**Bell:** “Is everyone...okay!?”

**Vice President:** “I’m fine! We almost fell, but Futayo ran back up!”

Suzu pictured that and it seemed a little unrealistic, so she decided to reconsider that image later. But...

**Silver Wolf:** “Suzu! My king and Tomo are down below! Can you search for them!?”

**Bell:** “Eh!? B-below...!?”

If they had been caught in the collapse, the worst case was a possibility.

*I need to hurry*, thought Suzu, but then she sensed something odd.

*...Huh?*

She sensed something beginning to fill the forest at the bottom of the collapse.

She moved her hands to shape the model accordingly and ended up with something similar to water. It was...

*...Ether? A barrier? A spell?*

Something familiar and recognizable existed in the forest below the collapse.

“This is...”

Asama rolled to the ground from the rubble.

“Ouch...!”

The collapse had left her in the forest leading to the lake. The distance from the edge of the accumulated dirt to the ground had only been about 30cm, but she had fallen on her side. Her pelvis had hit a rock, so a throbbing pain filled her hip.

“Ow, ow, ow, ow...”

She placed a hand on her hip and found she had lost one of her rear tail binders.

It had been torn off in the collapse.

And she realized what this meant.

*...There was a landslide and I fell down.*

She looked up the slope and saw rock and dirt still spilling down.

It had an angle of about 80 degrees and a height of about 15 meters. She saw trees and bushes buried and carried by the landslide, which made her shudder.

Had a tree hit her, she would not have escaped unscathed.

And just as relief filled her, she heard a voice.

“Oh, you can move, Asama?”

The dirt rose up nearby as someone sat up.

“Toori-kun...!”

“W-wait, Toori-kun, are you okay!?”

Asama ran over to the dirt-covered crossdresser and then realized something.

Her broken tail binder was right there next to him.

*...Toori-kun!?*

That meant she had been “below” him. That explained the “oh, you can move?”

“U-um.”

He had saved her. Feeling flustered from that, she was unsure what to say and forced some words out of her.

“Um, where is Horizon?”

*...You idiot!*

*Isn't there anything else you could have said? At the very least, that's not the thing to say here,* she thought while feeling almost impressed with what she had said.

But he nodded and held out his opened right hand.

“Just before we fell, I went like this, right? And I pushed up on her butt to let Nate take care of her.”

“Why am I not surprised...”

But she felt somewhat relieved.

*...It's kind of incredible that he does do what he can do.*

She nodded and opened a sign frame. She could hear voices calling out to them from overhead.

If Horizon and Mitotsudaira understood the situation, they would have entrusted this to her.

So the first thing she had to do was grasp their situation here.

*...I lost Katsubaki somewhere too...*

She had been holding it, so she hoped she had dropped it somewhere up top. Meanwhile, she tried to use her sign frame.

“Eh?”

But her fingers swished through empty air.

The sign frame would not appear. No, it tried to, but static ran through it and it disappeared.

*...Interference!?*

Someone was applying powerful local god interference.

The Shinto gods were connected, so there should be enough divine transmission signal to establish a connection no matter where you were. But...

*...A barrier is blocking it in a limited area!*

It was obvious why someone would do that.

Either to strengthen a spell the interferer was going to use.

Or to prevent her from resisting.

Asama made sure she was fully aware of the risk here. As Musashi's Shinto Representative and someone knowledgeable in spells, she understood just how dangerous the situation was.

There was a way of getting around it. Even if the divine protections and transmissions from Musashi could not reach her...

“We have our Internal Blessings, so, um, Toori-kun, I’m going to adjust your ether fuel connection settings to-...”

She trailed off when she noticed the crossdresser had collapsed atop the dirt.

She realized blood was dripping from the side of his head. Had he hit it on a rock during the collapse? Or...

“Well, uh, how should I put this? I’m kind of relieved...”

“W-wait just a second! I need to take a look at that!”

“Also, Asama, you might want to take a look at your shrine maiden uniform.”

She did so and found it was torn. Her underboob was exposed and the internal pressure from the top of the breasts was about to tear through. Her stomach and legs were much the same, but...

“There’s no helping that now, so I don’t mind.”

She had bigger concerns right now.

Asama used her Internal Blessings to check on his condition. She checked his body and his head. *Hm, I know he has a screw loose in his head, so why are the readings perfectly normal? His body looks fine too.*

But there were signs of a concussion developing, so it would be best if she did not let him move.

She cast a stabilizing spell and then began manipulating his Internal Blessings.

“Sorry, but I’m going to use my administrative privileges to borrow some of your Internal Blessings.”

She found he had fallen asleep. This was an emergency and they were in danger, but the stabilizing spell must have taken effect.

*...And he could also relax because he knows I can handle this....*

*It’s a lot like him to fully rely on someone at a time like this,* she thought while taking a breath.

“Okay, I’m going to open a stealth barrier to hide us until help arrives....wait, eh?”

She realized their surroundings had suddenly grown quiet and cold.

Mary looked down while behind the others.

The detour route was exposed to shellfire, but it led to the forest below.

However, that forest was filled with ether light. Mary recognized the way it rippled while the water level calmly rose.

“This is...”

She was cut off by some external words. It was a divine transmission from “Musashi”.

**Musashi:** “I have detected a powerful ether reading! And it has been identified!”

This verified Mary’s concerns.

**Musashi:** “This is Sanada Ten Spears Unno Rokurou’s Yomi! It is being emitted from a depth of 5 meters below the collapse! Over.”

*They got us,* thought Tenzou while he looked down at the detour with the others behind him.

*...This Yomi requires a special emotion to escape!*

Most likely, Sanada had hoped they could destroy them with the shellfire, but even if that failed...

“The artillery and automatons would lure us into a charge down the slope. Then Yomi would stop us down there, allowing the artillery to finish us off.”

Just to be sure, Mochizuki had induced a landslide to send them all down there.

He honestly felt it was Mary’s attack that had stopped that plan, but...

**10ZO:** “Mary-dono, Yomi is expanding down there, but...”

He was not sure what to say, but he felt like he should thank her for before.  
However...

**<Scarred-sama has left the chat: confirmed>**

“Ehhhh!?”

He had no idea what was happening. And Naito sighed behind him.

“Tenzou, try to give this a little thought.”

“L-like what!?”

“You can’t do anything that reminds Ma-yan of the Yomi kiss solution.”

*...I didn’t know girls worked like that...*

But the Tachibana Couple exchanged a glance and a nod.

“Gin, we can still move while holding our breath, so how about we take care of this? ...Shall we go kiss?”

“Master Muneshige, please don’t talk about such indecent things in front of people. ...So let’s do it where no one can see us.”

“Judge. I will keep that in mind. ...1st Special Duty Officer, we will defeat the enemy spell user or destroy the spell source!”

Tenzou responded with a nod as the two of them ran off.

Then someone else stepped forward below the falling shells.

“I see. Then I should be safe as long as I am with my sex friend Masazumi!”

“Wait! Put me down! We can discuss this once you put me down, Futayo!”

*Masazumi-dono is surprisingly energetic for the battlefield,* thought Tenzou.

Just then, he heard a voice from upstream. Horizon’s sharp words were directed down below.

“Asama-sama! I have determined Toori-sama must be lying around there somewhere!”

And...

“If it looks like you’re going to suffocate and die inside Yomi, then go ahead



and do it! I've already taken his first time, so no need to restrain yourself!"

Things were pretty awful over there too.

Asama hung her head at the voice coming from overhead.

But the sounds from above were soon drowned out by shellfire. It was still a battlefield up there. And down here, she recalled what Horizon had said.

*...What is she asking me to do?*

But he was not breathing while he lay in front of her.

They had been swallowed up by Yomi while he slept. And yet...

"I..."

She could breath.

When she thought about why that was, she breathed a sigh.

She was fortunate that Izanami, ruler of Yomi, was open-minded.

*...She's accepted my feelings, hasn't she?*

Gods did not lie.

In that case, it did not matter that she had placed a lid over her feelings. Placing that lid there was an emotional act as well. So...

"Toori-kun."

Nothing could be done about the fact that he was crossdressing and that was just who he was.

"I will be, um, helping awaken your feelings by transferring a divine protection 'mouth-to-mouth', okay?"

It was not a kiss. After all, it was not a mutual act. It was entirely one-way from her.

What would he think about this if they survived? And what if...

*...What if this doesn't revive him?*

It would mean he did not feel the same way about her.

It would probably make her want to die.

But she had to do it.

“Yes...”

She thought about a number of things. It was true Horizon had already done this with him and both Mito and Mito’s mom had probably licked and sniffed him, so she felt this would be something similar to that.

*In that case, she thought.*

“Uuh...”

She tensed up. *No. I can’t let myself tense up.*

She had to work at doing this naturally, quickly, and politely. Yes, just like calligraphy. *Calm yourself, Asama Tomo. Breathe in. Good. Now tense up...*

*...No, don’t tense up!!*

*I’ve lived entirely the wrong life for this, she thought. I’m too used to Shinto decorum. But...*

“—————”

Suddenly, he bent his head back.

He could not breathe. He wanted air.

She felt like he was asking her to save him. So...

*...Ah.*

She reflexively placed her lips on his.

She was not tense at all. She simply thought she had to do this.

*...Breathe.*

Asama thought, *I won’t let you suffer.*

And she remembered that he had once kept those words hidden inside him.

He had lost something important to him, he had not known what to do, and so he had wished he could just disappear.

At the time, she had been powerless to help him. No, she had simply not tried to help him.

She had been too worried her strength was insufficient or that she would choose the wrong technique.

But now was different.

She felt remorse about parts of her past as well.

But now was not then.

Besides, he was always coming to her for help, wasn't he? When the guards were chasing him or their classmates were chasing him, he would run to her for a place to hide.

She would breathe an exasperated sigh and comply, but what was that really?

*...It's the usual way of things for us.*

So...

*...Toori-kun asking me for help and me giving it is the usual way of things.*

She was transferring a divine protection "mouth-to-mouth". If there were any feelings inside him, this would awaken them.

And she told herself she could not criticize her own feelings here.

No one else was here, so she chose not to hide anything.

*...I care about him so much.*

It was different from a romantic love. It was a stranger relationship than that. There might be some other word for the feeling, but she could not find a clear word for it despite her familiarity with Shinto prayers and such.

*Don't worry. No one can criticize you here.*

Not even her god could see her due to the interference.

"—————"

No sign frames appeared. There were no warnings from the god within her. So...

"Nh."

She removed her lips and pressed her forehead against him instead.

“Toori-kun.”

*Breathe. Just breathe. And...*

“...Ah.”

She saw his mouth open.

“Ah.”

He breathed.

Asama felt immense relief.

Sweat poured from her and she fell onto her butt next to him. She belatedly realized how heavy she was of breathing and how hot her face felt. But...

*...Thank goodness!*

Tears spilled from her eyes.

She had criticized herself for so very long.

She had told herself she should not feel that way, so she had placed a lid on her feelings. She did not care what anyone else thought, but...

“Toori-kun.”

The person she most wanted to accept those feelings felt the same way.

He had accepted her feelings and given her the same feelings in return.

*...Thank goodness...*

She wiped away the tears and stood up. She heard footsteps behind her.

“Is that where you were? Based on the commotion up top, I take it the Musashi Chancellor fell down here. ...Then I’d like for you to join me on stage. Especially when I went to the trouble of strengthening the spell for a stationary version.”

It was Unno Rokurou of the Sanada Ten Braves. Her voice was drawing closer, so Asama made up her mind. She gathered strength in her legs, slowly stood up,

and hid him with a stealth spell.

And she spoke to his sleeping face as she watched it vanish.

“I will take you back to the others soon, so wait just a little longer.”

Unno knew more or less where the enemy was.

There was no need to rush. They would be unable to move down here in the depths of Yomi. And even if they could move freely, their weapons and such would still be affected.

Their power to resist would be far weaker than while “above”. So...

*...Over there?*

There was a shadow beyond some fallen trees, suggesting they were using a spell to hide.

But Yomi was a motionless place. Any motion would reach her as ripples. The level of auditory and optical stealth spell that an individual would have on hand would be meaningless.

“So I will find them soon enough.”

Just as she thought that, a figure rushed out from behind a tree.

Unno recognized her. It was the Asama Shrine Representative. But there was no sign of the Musashi Chancellor. So...

*...That means he's over there, doesn't it?*

The Asama Shrine Representative was likely acting as bait, but her timing had been atrocious.

Of course, the Asama Shrine Representative was still an excellent target. Defeating her would be more than enough of a result.

But Unno decided to focus on the Musashi Chancellor. Defeat him and it would all be over.

*...So that's what I'll do.*

She walked toward the area past the trees.

But she frowned when she saw the Asama Shrine Representative continuing away. The girl's left leg limped in fake-looking way.

"Dammit! She knows how my spell works, doesn't she!?"

Asama heard Unno's footsteps approaching her.

*...It worked!*

She knew she made for poor bait, so she had chosen a certain method.

*...Acting.*

She was limping with her left leg. Of course, she was not actually injured. It was an act.

But there was a reason for that act.

"Her spell is a stage!"

She probably used it to provide dances as offerings. Unno Rokurou was a kabuki expert. For her, the spell was the same as a theatre stage, so...

*...She can't ignore someone putting on an "act" within the barrier!*

If she did ignore it and her god decided she had neglected the "stage", then her spell would be destroyed.

So Asama put on an act. She interfered by letting the spell's god see her act.

She had analyzed the substitution method of Unno's spell and taken advantage of it.

And Unno had pursued her.

*...This will be fine.*

Asama could not fight back without Katatsubaki, but she did have defense spells. She had more than 30 Internal Blessings, so she should be able to endure a few attacks. For now, she hurried away to keep Unno from catching up.

"...!?"

But then something hit her.

A horizontal blow hit her from the left.

*...Eh!?*

Surprised, Asama wondered if there had been another enemy here.

But she saw something beyond the scattering light of the defense barrier which had automatically activated.

*...A fan sword!*

It had flown in an arc to circle in front of her and crash into her. The defense barrier was the only reason its thick blade had not sliced her body apart.

She might have even died. And...

“...!”

A second one hit her in the side, knocking her from her feet.

She crashed back down onto the dirt piled up to her right.

Asama forced out the breath caught in her throat after the impact. And...

“...”

The convulsing of her body let the contents of her stomach escape from her throat.

Was she right to feel lucky it was only stomach acid? But...

“—————”

Her burning throat heaved and a scratchy breath escaped her curled-up body.

Her entire body was so tense she no longer felt like herself. And...

“That sure was easy. ...You really should have stayed on the rear guard.” Unno stood close by. “Honestly, you neglect yourself when you worry about someone else.”

*...Eh?*

Unno almost seemed to be reminding herself of that fact, but she raised her

fan sword as she spat out the words.

“No regrets, okay? I’ll start with you.”

She swung down the blade.

Unno heard a solid sound.

It was the sound of several defense barriers shattering before her eyes.

The Asama Shrine Representative was curled up as if trying to bury herself in the pile of dirt. The fan sword shattered the thick layers of defense barriers that opened beyond the girl’s outstretched hand, but...

*...She sure has a lot of Internal Blessings!*

She was Musashi’s Shinto Representative. And she must have restricted her spells to only defensive ones.

But the impacts were reaching the girl. Unno’s sword strikes struck her as blunt blows.

“Hyah!”

With each hit, Unno heard a cry of pain.

But she did not go easy on the girl. This was a stage. If she did not complete this, Yomi would disappear. So she used her fan sword to pummel rather than cut.

“C’mon, say it! Tell me to stop!”

Unno spoke to get the girl to give up on her act.

“It’s all an act, isn’t it!? Then quit it! You’re about to get yourself killed to protect someone else! So tell me to stop! Put your own safety first! Admit that your self-sacrifice was an act and step down from the stage!”

*Oh, hell, thought Unno. I’m talking to myself here, aren’t I?*

*...Yeah, I am.*

She honestly thought the Ten Braves should retire in Sanada land.

No one insisted they had to die during the Osaka Campaign. Some admitted



there was enough room for interpretation for them to stay alive. But Unno saw it somewhat differently.

*...Can't we just give up on our inherited names without worrying about any of that?*

The way Unno saw it, they had *become* the Sanada Ten Braves.

They were name inheritors.

So couldn't they decide they were no longer Unneeded?

Couldn't they compromise and accept what they had instead of trying to rival their past as the Seven Spears and Hashiba's aides?

*...I doubt our teachers wanted us to die.*

So why did the others keep going?

When she had earned the shrine maiden qualifications at Sanada's Yamaga Shrine and activated one of that shrine's spells for the first time, she had honestly wanted to just live there for the rest of her life.

When she trained there every single morning, it had been about more than just preparing for battle.

She was allowed to be there.

She had found a new home.

But the others apparently saw things differently. They were trying to fulfill their inherited names for their own pride and for the people who had created that new home for them.

She understood that she used her own pride in a convenient and cheap way. She understood she was being wishy-washy.

*...But is that not how it works?*

What was wrong with wanting to live? What was wrong with being sick of fighting?

Weren't those good things? Weren't they far better than wanting to die and

loving to fight? But...

“Quit it!”

She smashed another defense barrier with her fan sword.

“I mean, you’re not even a name inheritor, are you!? So why!?”

When she said that, Unno saw the sharp look the Asama Shrine Representative was giving her.

There was strength and willpower there. That girl was not even close to giving up.

Even though losing her defense barriers would only mean death.

“Why?”

“I believe,” replied the girl while trying to catch her breath. “I knew it wouldn’t be easy for a number of reasons, but I believe he’ll figure something out, that we can continue on together, and that the others won’t be able to ignore us.”

*Is she talking about some childhood promise?* wondered Unno.

That was ridiculous. Lovely stories like that did not exist in reality. Because if they did...

“Why didn’t it work out that way for us!?”

Unno knew they too had experienced defeat and lost much.

So how could this girl still believe in something like that? Why didn’t she see their deaths in the future like the Ten Braves did?

Was it because she lived in Musashi which had the future of Matsudaira ahead of them? No. Even then, they would still have to confront large and powerful nations. One wrong step and theirs would be a future of servitude.

“How!?”

*Dammit,* thought Unno.

*...I know the answer.*

It was not that they had some reason that allowed them to believe in that

childish promise.

It was because they could believe in that childish promise that they had a reason.

It was reversed.

The Ten Braves had become people who could not even make such silly promises. They had been defeated, made excuses, and feared another loss.

These kids were different. They believed they could make a comeback no matter how many times they lost. That was why.

Unno had to have believed the same once.

Until she had experienced defeat and learned to fear losing.

*...Oh, so that's it.*

These Far Eastern people had been ruled for a very long time.

So they had begun from a position of defeat. They had come this far carrying the defeated Far East on their shoulders.

Of course they did not fear losing. They had started with defeat, so they had nowhere to go but up. The future must look so very bright when viewed from that position. Everything they did would lead to something better than defeat.

"So that's why you can believe in it."

As silly as it might be, it was worth believing in. And that gave them freedom.

When Unno compared herself to that...

"Okay, let's test this."

That is...

"Let's see if anyone will give you the answer you believe in!"

Unno swung down her fan sword.

With a solid sound, the Asama Shrine Representative's defense barrier shattered and did not recover.

She had run out of Blessings.

It was over. So Unno raised her fan sword once more. And...

“Well, where’s your answer!?”

Just as she asked that, Unno felt someone grab her waist hard points from behind.

“It’s right here!!”

And they pulled her skirt and tights down past her knees.

Mitotsudaira heard a familiar type of scream in an unfamiliar voice coming from the forest below.

She frowned at the voice that reached her despite the din of artillery.

“...Huh?”

She exchanged a look with the others below the shellfire, but Horizon glared down at the forest.

“That was Toori-sama, wasn’t it?”

“Yeah...”

Everyone had to agree.

“Toori-kun!?”

Unno saw the Asama Shrine Representative turn around and run behind her.

Unno was too busy keeping her underwear from falling to intervene.

“Wh-wh-what do you think you’re doing!?”

“Shut up!”

When she turned around, she saw an unfamiliar girl there. The girl stood in front of the Asama Shrine Representative wiggled her hips to the side, flipped her black hair back, pointed at Unno, and asked a question.

“Who the hell are you!?”

“That’s my line!”

The Asama Shrine Representative's mouth spread horizontally at this exchange. After a moment, she grabbed the other girl's head, removed her hair, and lifted it up.

Then she put it back in place.

"Go on."

She urged Unno to continue, so...

"You're the Musashi Chancellor!?"

"You should've known I was!"

Unno was fairly certain anything she said would result in an irritating answer, so for the time being, she pulled her tights back up and reattached the inner suit to her waist hard points.

"You two are such a pain."

She sent her fan sword out in a straight line.

Asama heard a metallic clang in front of her.

She realized the crossdresser had struck a  $\Psi$ -pose and there was something like a giant shield in front of him.

The crossdresser nodded at it and whistled.

"The Tachibana Wife, huh!? That scream was enough to clue you in?"

"Judge," said Gin with a nod. She then knocked back the fan sword she had blocked with her arms and pointed at the enemy with her giant right hand. "The way this Yomi solidifies and chills the body is indeed troublesome. But it was not enough for the Amore Charge that Master Muneshige and I made while holding our breath."

*Gin-san has such incredible lung capacity...* thought Asama.

She realized Muneshige was also running toward her to protect her.

And there was someone else behind Unno.

"Tenzou-kun!"

“Judge.” Tenzou nodded. “It would seem we arrived in time, Toori-dono and Asama-dono.”

Unno considered sending everything she had against her immediate opponent and then retreating.

The Yomi spell had already been broken. Because she had broken character when she screamed before.

She had nothing at the moment. And...

“It is about time for you to leave, Sanada Representative.”

She heard Musashi’s 1st Special Duty Officer speaking behind her on the right.

After overcoming Yomi last time, that boy must have learned how to move within it.

5-against-1 was simply too much for her.

Kakei and Mochizuki must have been defeated up above, so she felt surrendering was a valid option. But...

*...I can’t.*

She was sick of it all and she was bad at focusing on herself.

*...I’ll go with you.*

She had her thoughts on the matter, but she had known them a long time. So when it came down to it...

“Let’s go.”

She raised her fan sword.

It did not matter if it was hopeless. Two of the Sanada Ten Braves had already been lost here.

Perhaps she no longer wanted to continue on with them. So perhaps she wanted to lose here and be abandoned by the others. But...

*...Who even knows.*

*Honestly, this is so different from how timid I was being before.*

“Asama Shrine Representative,” said Unno. “You are probably right.”

“—————”

This was the first time she had seen that surprised look on the girl’s face. If this was all it took to change that defiant look from before, then this had been a lot of wasted effort. So...

“Come!”

Unno raised her fan sword and moved forward.

Tachibana Gin stepped toward her.

It was an immediate shift from defense and she did not hold a weapon. But...

*...She has her prosthetic arms.*

It would be a physical blow. And the enemy twisted her body to dodge Unno’s blade.

“This is an excellent place for confirming one’s emotions.”

With those words, a metal fist flew toward Unno’s right side.

The single blow took out a few of her ribs.

“Gah...!”

And she crashed back-first into a pile of dirt at the bottom of the cliff.

Asama took a breath now that the battle was over.

She was worried about Unno, but she wanted to thank the Tachibana Couple and Tenzou first. However...

“Whew, that’s a relief. I’m glad nothing serious happened.”

With those words, he rested his forehead on her shoulder. And Muneshige turned toward them.

“Chancellor, it would be safest to regroup with the others as soon as possible.”

“No, Toori-kun is injured. ...Oh, but I’ve used up all my Internal Blessings.”

“In that case,” Gin smiled a little, “You should borrow his Blessings to heal him somewhere calm.”

“I think I’ll have you check on a number of things then, Asama.”

He stood up.

Tenzou must have already decided on a rendezvous point with the others because he pointed, said “over there”, and began walking.

But Asama was still worried about Unno. She doubted Unno would notice since she was unconscious, but Asama bowed toward her.

“Hanami, cast a first aid spell on her. I can secure the Blessing with a meal, can’t I?”

“You can. ...Clap!”

After watching Hanami fly off, Asama relaxed her shoulders.

In the dark forest, Tenzou led the way, Gin and Muneshige followed, and Asama walked alongside him a short distance behind. He had removed the shirt of his crossdressing summer uniform. He had stowed the pads in the skirt, so he was currently topless. But...

“Here, take my shirt.”

When he handed it to her, Asama remembered how badly damaged her shrine maiden equipment was.

“Yes, thank you.”

She put it on, but...

*...I knew it. The chest is too tight to close...*

There was no helping that, so she hung her head and kept walking. But that silence felt too awkward, so she asked a question.

“Um, Toori-kun? Why did you come to save me back there?”

“Oh, that? Well, I promised, right? That I would handle all of the difficult stuff.”

*I knew it, she thought.*



*...He said he would figure something out even if I lost my power. And that the others wouldn't be able to ignore it even if he couldn't do anything on his own.*

That was exactly what had happened. So...

*...I'm glad I believed in him.*

She had not tried to believe. She simply had. And...

"Besides, I only survived after passing out in Yomi because you kissed me, right?"

"Eh? W-well, um..."

She tried to find some kind of excuse, but then he turned toward her.

"Hmm." He crossed his arms, frowned, and blushed. "You know what? Since the cat's out of the bag about me feeling the same way, I've got something to say."

"Yes?"

"I was planning to tell you eventually."

"A-and what is it?"

"I feel so lame right now," he muttered while scratching his head. "I mean, I make this way harder than it has to be, just like you do."

"Huh?"

Toori saw the confusion on Asama's face.

*...Was that not straightforward enough?*

When he said "well", she said "yes?" The way she leaned forward a bit made it clear she wanted him to tell her. So he gathered his resolve.

"A lid."

At first, Asama obviously did not know what he meant by that, but a few seconds later, she frowned.

"Wow."

She quickly blushed and he nodded a few times with his face just as red.

“I had a lid too. Although I’d decided to get rid of it when you decided to come live with us.”

“O-ohh... Yes, s-sorry. Come to think of it, that does make sense...”

He was the same. They had known each other forever and they shared the same everyday life, so he had a lid in place as well.

*...It’s always been the same with us.*

So relying on each other, saving each other, resting a head in the each other’s lap, or cooking food for each other was not enough to dislodge that emotional lid.

But with recent events, he had somewhat removed his lid and she had responded in kind. So...

“Umm, it’ll be really exciting at my place, but you know what? I’m going to try to be more open with my feelings.”

“O-oh. ...F-feel free. Yes, and feel free with Horizon and Mito too.”

“Yeah, but Horizon and Nate are a whole different thing. I’m talking about you right now. I feel lame saying this, but I can’t deny I don’t want to lose you or let go of you, so remember that, okay?”

“Okay.”

He wanted to say more to her as she blushed and shrank down, but he had hit his limit. Except...

“Huh? Asama, it looks like Yomi is still affecting you a little.”

“Eh? It’s thinned out quite a bit, but is there something wrong with me?”

“Yeah.” He nodded. “So stay still, close your eyes, and look up.”

“Oh, okay.”

She did as he said even though she had to know where this was headed.

“—————”

Toori placed his lips on Asama’s.

...W-wow.

Asama kept herself from thinking about what was happening.

She knew he would tell her what it meant later, so for now, she just let it happen.

And for a few seconds, pressure rose and fell between them as if to lightly confirm each other's presence.

“—————”

When she took a breath and faced forward, her vision was blurry. The tension had brought tears to her eyes.

But she saw him smiling past that.

“I purified it ‘mouth-to-mouth’, so you’ll be fine now.”

When he said that, Asama belatedly felt a blush on her face.

He had just returned the favor. Just as she had, he had used the “mouth-to-mouth method” to show how he felt.

No one else was watching them, so it was their shared secret.

And a thought occurred to her.

*...If we're the same, does that mean I don't have to confess to him for a while yet?*



“Asama.”

“Yes?”

“An official one will have to wait until after you ‘tell me’ properly, okay?”

She gulped.

*...I’m probably going to get teased for this...*

She had already accepted it enough for that to only feel like a small problem.

She found a sign frame had opened by her hand. They had left Yomi. And...

“Hey!”

Everyone was there. And beyond them was the lake.

“Listen up, everyone. ...Once we pass that warship, we will be at the Houjou ruins.”

Masazumi took the leading role as usual, but why was she being carried by Futayo?

“So what’s this? Did you come to pick me up?”

Takigawa spoke to two people standing on the Kanie Castle’s deck as the ship continued its artillery bombardment.

One of the two was Yoshiaki with Weiss Fürstin positioned upright next to her.

The other was a girl with long black hair fanned out around her. She was the same age as Yoshiaki and her most notable feature was...

“I thought the younger generation of Loup-Garous had flat chests, but is it actually more normal to have large ones?”

“No, no. I really don’t think that’s true.”

The bitterly smiling person wore an M.H.R.R. summer uniform as black as her hair.

She placed a hand on an open-collared chest and lightly bowed.

“I am #7 of Hashiba’s Ten Spears. My name is Kasuya Takenori. I was riding a ship to Edo, but when I heard the situation from Yoshiaki, I insisted on paying you a visit.”

“I see. I hear Ishida Mitsunari has joined you as #3, so you’re finally all together, huh?”

“All together...is not how I would put it,” said Yoshiaki with drooping shoulders. And, “Hashiba asked that we return you to P.A. Oda.”

“That’s not happening.”

Takigawa’s response was immediate, but Yoshiaki was not done yet.

“If your goal is to show your pride as a retainer to the people of the Edo region, haven’t you already done enough?”

“It isn’t that easy. And you two coming here is perfect for me. ...You know what I mean, don’t you?”

The two girls had different reactions to Takigawa’s question.

First, Yoshiaki nodded and took a step back with eyebrows raised.

Next, Kasuya stepped forward without nodding. She positioned herself as a shield for Yoshiaki.

“Takigawa, a crucial history recreation still awaits you once you return to P.A. Oda.”

“Shaja. The Battle of Shizugatake with Shiba and the others, right? After our master’s death, the Oda forces split between the Hashiba faction and the Shibata faction. That conflict is settled at the Battle of Shizugatake fought at Shiba’s home.”

The result of that internal conflict was obvious.

“Shiba and Lady Oichi commit suicide in their castle. I participate in that battle and lose. But the good news is that a group of younger warriors make a name for themselves during the Battle of Shizugatake. ...A group that becomes known as the Seven Spears of Shizugatake.”

“Testament. That would be us.”

“In that case,” said Takigawa. “Couldn’t you just make a name for yourselves here?”

Yoshiaki realized what Takigawa was aiming for.

“Takigawa, your goal here isn’t reducing the burden on Hashiba, is it?”

“What do you think it is?”

“You’re trying to limit the conflict within P.A. Oda as much as possible.”

“It’s all in how you phrase it.” Takigawa smiled and shrugged. “But isn’t that how it works? Maybe I’m just getting old, but while defeating an enemy is all well and good, I just don’t want to see our own people fighting each other.”

“Neither do we.”

“You don’t really understand,” said Takigawa. “Your generation has a future in the Testament. ...But it’s over for us. That makes it hard to course correct yourself as you grow older.”

So...

“So if there’s going to be any fighting, I want to make sure our underclassmen can defeat *that*.”

She pointed into the eastern sky.

The Musashi’s great size was visible even at night. Kasuya found herself following Takigawa’s gaze up toward it. They looked up at that dark shape blotting out a portion of the sky.

“The Siege of Odawara is complete...and the Sanada group has been driven off. Even though Houjou and Sanada were destined to meet their ‘end’ here,” said Takigawa. “Hey, am I really allowed to hold hope in the future?”

“...If there is a way of stopping the Apocalypse.”

“Shaja. That’s the great thing about P.A. Oda. We have the Genesis Project.” The corners of her mouth rose. “But Matsunaga Hisahide said Musashi was a ‘creator’ while we are ‘destroyers’.”

“Are you tired of destroying?”

*That was a leading question,* thought Yoshiaki even as she asked it. But Takigawa shook her head.

“I realized there’s something only we can create.”

Yoshiaki thought about what that meant. Takigawa had seen her “end” and accepted the enemy’s methods, so what was it she could “create”?

But before Yoshiaki could find the answer, Kasuya moved. She took a step forward.

“I will take this opportunity to train, Takigawa.”

Yoshiaki understood what Kasuya meant. And she asked her own question past Kasuya’s shoulder.

“Are you telling us to create the next generation?”

“Yes, but I’m not sure if it will actually happen or not. Still, I know Musashi and I know the people who lost to them. ...And now I’m learning what it’s like to be one of the defeated. ...Listen. We all took everything seriously, we knew we only had one chance at this, and we had plenty of skill...but we lost and will lose to a group of idiots with idealistic dreams about the future and uncertain skills,” said Takigawa. “So do you know what it is you need to not give up on yourself?”

“Willpower alone isn’t enough,” said Takigawa. “Nor is skill alone.”

And...

“Nor is it companions, money, or family. For one thing, a lot of them started without any of that,” she explained. “So how about it? Could you keep going without giving up on yourself?”

Takigawa stepped back. It was only a few steps, but it was a light and significant movement.

“I will have Musashi show me as well, but can you show me first?”

“Well...”

Kasuya started to ask something, but then she shook her head.

No questions were necessary. She had just asked for training, so...



“I will gladly take the opportunity. But...”

“But?”

“You will be testing whether or not I will give up, correct? Then I hope you are prepared to go that far.”

Because...

“I am the vanguard of the Ten Spears. Also...”

“Also?”

“Do you intend to count this training as the Battle of Shizugatake?”

Takigawa nodded her head.

“I don’t like making things too fancy. And battling you here instead of later is the upperclassmanly thing to do since it will help you grow as much as possible. So once we finish this and I test Musashi, we will step down.”

Takigawa spoke from her heart.

“Once I have tested what needs to be tested, I will leave the rest to all of you and step down from the Warring States period.”

Kasuya prepared to fight.

She was more cautious of Takigawa’s willpower than her words.

No more words were necessary and Takigawa’s willpower had become clear.

*...That’s right.*

A name inheritor had said she was setting aside her name.

She must have already found an answer within herself. She must have found something about creation and destruction between Musashi and them.

And she had come to realize her own limits.

She had found an ideology that kept someone from giving up on themselves.

And Takigawa Ichimasu had realized she could not do that or accept it.

*So, thought Kasuya. What did the future look like to her?*

She wanted to ask, but words would only get in the way.

Kasuya and the others simply had to create the era that woman had predicted. And she was testing them to see if they could create it. So there was just one thing she should say here.

“Let’s do this.”

Kasuya dropped the two cases she had been carrying between her hair and back.

As soon as she opened them and placed her hands on them, Takigawa moved.

The woman’s very first step carried her maximum speed.

# **Chapter 70: Woman Bidding Farewell Atop the Water**

## 第七十章

### 『水面上の見送り女』

当たるかな  
当たるかなあ  
当たるかなあ……  
配点（前向きに）



*Will it hit?*

*Maybe it will hit*

*I hope it hits...*

### **Point Allocation (Stay Positive)**

The artificial lake surrounding the Kanie Castle was the same color as the night sky.

The divine protections and equipment provided by the Musashi's bamboo spear launchers allowed the Musashi group to cross the lake's surface from the bank, but they soon noticed something.

After the upstream and downstream teams regrouped, they split apart again to approach the Kanie Castle along two different routes, but...

**Tonbokiri:** "The Kanie Castle is no longer firing on us."

**Mar-Ga:** "What did you all do this time?"

**10ZO:** "Wh-why do you make it sound like we did something wrong!?"

But it was true. Masazumi straightened up while being carried by Futayo and spoke.

"Is the Kanie Castle active?"

"Judge. It is definitely in standby mode."

**Silver Wolf:** "We see the same thing from upstream. Tomo, how are the ether readings?"

**Asama:** "Eh!? Oh, y-yes, it appears to be in standby mode."

**Smoking Girl:** "I see the same thing from up here. It just stopped firing all of a sudden. But I did see something odd a bit beforehand. ...Suzu."

**Bell:** "Right. I picked it up. It was just for an instant...though."

An image appeared on all of their sign frames. It was a model of the Kanie Castle and its surroundings that Suzu had created. But the focus was on the main deck.

Suzu's model even included the explosions and defense barriers above the ship.

With those in the way, it would generally be difficult to perceive what lay beyond them. But...

"I managed to...pick it...up."

A straight line led from the deck to the southern sky. And that path led to...

**Flat Vassal:** "Is that a *schale besen*? With two people riding it?"

**Mar-Ga:** "Margot, that's the one that Katou Yoshiaki used when dueling the udon, isn't it?"

**Marube-ya:** "Don't call us udon! We're doing our best to keep on living!"

**Mar-Ga:** "And now the female udon is complaining. ...Anyway, if she's leaving the Kanie Castle now, would that be Takigawa behind her? Are they letting her escape?"

**Bell:** "No? There's still...someone on the...deck. And..."

They saw some silhouettes before Suzu could finish speaking.

They were approaching the Musashi teams from the Kanie Castle's side of the lake. They were...

"Takigawa's ninjas!"

Gunfire rang out and the enemy began to run. They were ninjas, so they could run across the water without anything solid to stand on.

Futayo described the situation while still carrying Masazumi.

**Tonbokiri:** "So it is a showdown!"

The battle was fought on the flat surface of the water.

The Musashi group's strategy was to have the warrior unit work with the primary fighters.

First, the warrior unit lined up defense barriers and moved forward while the primary fighters charged from behind or above that to tear down the enemy's

front line.

Naito and Naruze's firepower from above was especially effective, but...

"They're coming from the left and right!"

The enemy's ability to walk on water was a problem. The Musashi warrior unit was forced to advance along the pathway, so they tended to concentrate in that one direction. Meanwhile, Takigawa's ninjas could run across the water, so...

"Look! Look, look! Over here! I'm over herrrrre!"

"Hey, hey! I'm right here, buddy!"

"Can't catch me!! C'mon, Musashi warriors, you scared!?"

They distracted the warriors with some pretty intense provocation. And when Takigawa saw it from the Kanie Castle...

"Hey! Quit playing around so much."

"But this is our last battle!"

Takigawa heard their pleas over the divine transmission.

"No one can complain if we're loud and silly just this one time!"

"Shaja! I mean, this is the end for us either way!"

"Indeed," they all said. "We are the Takigawa Unit! And true to that name, we're unbeatable on the water!"<sup>[6]</sup>

*So that's their strategy*, thought Tenzou when he saw what the Takigawa Unit was doing.

He found the enemy had surrounded them in a circle while running on the lake. Those ninjas made long-distance attacks and approached for decoy close-range attacks while maintaining that circle.

The enemy had stopped the shellfire because there were no openings in their movements as they approached and backed away from the Musashi group.

There was always an attack coming from somewhere in the circle, so the

Musashi group could not move.

There was no cover on the water. They were reliant on their defense barriers, but that meant their allies had to act as their shields.

As the enemy ran atop the water, he saw hints of ether light surrounding their footwork.

Their ninja technique was strengthened with a spell. They had likely taken the standard ninja technique to walk on water and given it more speed...

*...And added a sliding effect!*

That explained why the enemy could slide like they were on ice. The enemy circled around them on the left and right and maintained their circle even when that meant jumping over the pathway.

That brought the Musashi group to a halt, but...

“Don’t fall in! You’ll sink with your armor on!”

The water was probably about 5 meters deep. It was fairly shallow since it was an artificial lake, but that was still too deep to keep your head above water if you sank. Besides, Musashi residents were not accustomed to dealing with deep water in a natural environment.

It was also night, so the fear would clutch at their hearts all the more.

And the enemy sped up their movement. They slid along the water, accelerated, and rushed toward the Musashi group’s pathway.

“...!”

Then they made a spinning leap and either fired a projectile or threw a blade from midair.

Then the leaping enemy would land on the opposite side of the water facing the other way. And without losing any momentum, they would slalom back to the circle of their fellow ninjas while remaining cautious of the Musashi group.

Concentrated gunfire and sword jabs targeted them from the circle. The number of horizontal slashes in particular continued to grow.

“Ha ha ha. These are the Oda clan’s sliding tactics passed down since the Age



of the Gods!”

“We are advancing to a new age by incorporating the history recreation into our actions!”

“Now, we invite you to a fleeting illusion tonight.”

“D-do you have to be so irritating!?” shouted Tenzou, but it was a pressing situation.

The horizontal slashes were growing in speed and weight.

The warriors on the receiving end were highly trained, but they were forced to fall back when blocking several in a row.

The pathway across the lake was not exactly wide. The Musashi group was gradually narrowing in and growing in density.

“Hey! Tenzou!”

The idiot’s voice reached him from the upstream pathway. Tenzou looked back and saw the topless crossdresser waving toward him. It was unclear what the idiot was enjoying about this situation, but...

“Rock, paper, scissors, go!”

Tenzou played rock and the idiot played paper. *Fair enough*, thought Tenzou. And...

“Okay, Tenzou! That earns you a loser’s punishment!”

“Why!?”

He did not understand, but he did notice that the enemy’s horizontal slashes had come to a stop.

And just then...

**Bell:** “Watch...out!”

Immediately following Suzu’s shout, the Kanie Castle fired shells. And they came from the main cannons, not the secondary ones.

The shells were headed...

**Bell:** “Up and...straight ahead...!”

“Toori-kun!”

Asama hurriedly created defense barriers from his ether supply.

She created three for the shells arriving from above and straight ahead.

*...With the upstream and downstream passageways, I need four, so I'm one short!*

“Asama-dono! I will stop one of them with Tonbo Spare!”

“Futayo! Please do!”

“Judge!” replied Futayo as she tried to raise Tonbo Spare overhead. “Oh, whoops. I forgot I was carrying Masazumi. Now I can't target it. My mistake.”

Gin aimed Arcabuz Cruz at Futayo's back and repeatedly mimed pulling the trigger. It was likely a new stress relief method. However, they had a more pressing threat than stress.

“Mary! Please stop it with Excalibur!”

“Eh!? Oh, y-yes! I need to join them together and block the shell, right!?”

**10ZO:** “Mary-dono! Take care of that for us!”

**Scarred:** “...”

Mary blushed and froze in place.

**Asama:** “Wh-what are you doing, Tenzou-kun!?”

**Mar-Ga:** “That ninja should just stop talking forever.”

**Unturning:** “That sounds a little harsh, but given the situation, I can't blame you.”

**10ZO:** “Now my abuse is being analyzed!?”

**Bell:** “U-um? I-it's going to...hit!?”

Takigawa's ninjas saw the explosion of light from the lake.

The anti-ship defense barriers created by the Asama Shrine Representative

were reflected off the dark lake surface, creating twice the usual light. Three barriers shattered, two downstream and one upstream. That was one too few to stop all of the shells.

“So it’ll hit them!”

The one shell fired straight on at the upstream pathway tore into the enemy formation. It definitely hit the enemy unit along a low trajectory.

And once the light scattered, the falling ether light illuminated...

“No damage!?”

The enemy formation had not been broken.

“I blocked it!”

The silver wolf’s voice came from the front of the Musashi forces on the upstream pathway. She held something in front of her wrapped in chains.

“The Logismoï Oplo, Aspida Phylargia!”

The wolf had created a platform and supporting legs out of chains to hold up the large shield.

As a result, the shell bounced off the lake in the distance and flew into the forest on the bank.

But that was not all. Someone slowly stood up behind the shield-wielding wolf.

It was Musashi’s princess. She immediately opened up a giant weapon in her hands.

And she spoke to the enemy ninjas circling in front of the Kanie Castle as they surrounded the upstream Musashi group.

“Special Attack: Muneshige Bow!”

Gin saw Muneshige clench his right hand in front of his chest.

*...Master Muneshige, you are allowed to celebrate more than that. Why are*

*you being so reserved?*

*He must have finished his FAQ site, she thought with a smile.*

Then she saw the upstream enemy circle collapse. Almost half of them were hit right in the heart.

“Gwaaaaaaaah! R-right in my weak heart!? My weak heart that makes me sneak food in the middle of the night!”

“Nwaaaaaaaah! I-I’m sorry! I knew that stairway in the academy lets you see up the summer uniform skirts!”

“Why didn’t you tell meeeeeeeee!? Gwaaaaah! I know it’s a bad habit, but I just can’t help but make more and more porn image folders!”

Their cries of agony could not have been more obvious. And thanks to their spells, they writhed around on top of the lake’s surface.

But the enemy was well trained. The upstream group quickly reformed their circle and created an opening with which to rescue their collapsed comrades. And the downstream group...

“This isn’t over yet! Let’s keep at it!”

True to their word, Gin heard a certain sound.

But that sound was the Kanie Castle moving the cannons on its upper deck.

*...The rear main cannons!*

Combine those two cannons with the front main cannons and it could fire a total of six shells.

Gin began to summon Cuatro Cruz.

She knew she had to shoot down the enemy shells from a lower angle.

*...Will I make it in time!?*

But before she could summon Cuatro Cruz, something appeared in front of her.

A single sign frame had arrived before her eyes. It was written in the Chancellor’s handwriting and it said...

...*“Loser’s Punishment Notification”...!?*

Just then, she heard the enemy’s main cannons firing.

It was all six at once.

Takigawa saw it from the edge of the Kanie Castle’s deck.

Six metal main cannon shells were launched. Three upstream and three downstream. However...

...*Oh?*

The enemy’s arrangement of defense barriers was odd. She had expected three upstream and three downstream, but...

“They only opened them upstream!?”

*Are they abandoning the downstream group?* she wondered.

Then the shells arrived and something occurred just as their destructive power was unleashed.

The enemy’s downstream gravitational control pathway suddenly sank into the water.

The Takigawa Unit saw the six splashes of the shell hits.

Upstream, they saw the three splashes of shattering light from the defense barriers.

Downstream, the enemy had sunk below the lake’s surface, so...

“It’s water!”

The surface of the lake bent downwards and the shell tore a hole in the center of that curved plane.

Then that hole burst back up as the water was blasted up into the air.

But the Takigawa Unit saw something else as those splashes dropped back down as rain.

It happened to several of their allies surrounding the downstream enemies.

“W-waaaaaaaaahh!!”

They screamed as they began sliding sideways across the lake.

And when the others turned to see what happened, it happened to even more of them.

“Waaaaaaaaaaaaahh!!”

Twenty or so ninjas slid across the water and kicked up some waves while still standing perfectly upright.

Someone inside the water was dragging them across and into the lake. And...

“—————!”

As soon as they vanished below the surface, something hopped up from within the water.

The Takigawa Unit could guess what this was dragging tons of water up from the bottom of the lake.

“Musashi’s downstream unit!”

“ ‘Musashi’-san, you have awfully fine control over such long distances.”

“Judge. This was a barrier-style spell, so it was already locked to a specific coordinate. Instead of controlling it, I only altered the coordinate setting. Over,” explained “Musashi” while setting up a table on Musashino’s bow deck and serving Sakai’s dinner there. “The artificial lake’s minimal wildlife also made it easier to control. Over.”

“Yeah, too much of that would make for a lot of noise, wouldn’t it?”

“Judge.” “Musashi” nodded while lining up the plates. “I also sent some buffering spells because underwater explosive blasts are actually just as dangerous as direct hits. Over.”

“I see. Couldn’t you have just sent them some defense barriers?”

“Testament Union regulations restrict the distance at which I can send

personal ones. The gravity pathways are meant to provide a path back to the Musashi, so the same regulations do not apply. Over.”

“Oh, so those pathways are actually meant to let them leave the Kanie Castle, huh?”

“Judge,” confirmed “Musashi”. “Are you curious how I run the Musashi? If so, there is much more I could tell you. Over.”

The Takigawa Unit saw the enemy move.

They had changed position, pathway and all. Also, the downstream pathway had moved to match the upstream one’s position, creating a single continuous pathway.

One half of the enemy was soaked and the other half was windswept, but they managed to regroup.

The Takigawa Unit’s downstream group noticed a gap between them and the enemy’s pathway.

They also noticed someone facing them from the edge of the downstream pathway.

“The Musashi Vice Chancellor!”

She carried the soaking wet and unmoving Vice President over her shoulder and she held her spear horizontally instead of vertically.

“Bind, Tonbo Spare!”

Tenzou pointed at their leader while water cascaded from his ninja outfit.

“Wh-what was that for, Toori-dono!?”

“Huh!? Blame yourself for losing the rock-paper-scissors game! You were really supposed to get a boiling hot bath like in a Shinto trial!”

“S-stop doubling down on your crap!”

**Tachibana Wife:** “What would have happened if our feet weren’t fixed in

place with gravitational control?”

**Asama:** “It’s a good thing Toori-kun is so good at rock-paper-scissors.”

**Flat Vassal:** “The Chancellor is weirdly lucky at that game, isn’t he?”

**Mar-Ga:** “This would’ve been more interesting if it wasn’t just our fighters who got soaking wet.”

**10ZO:** “Don’t draw that! Don’t you dare draw that!”

Meanwhile, they were running down the double-width pathway and began responding to the Takigawa Unit.

Futayo and Mitotsudaira moved to the front and charged toward the enemy.

The rest picked up speed and followed those two toward the Kanie Castle’s side of the lake, but...

*...Oh?*

Something was placed over Tenzou’s head from behind. It was a spare red scarf.

He looked back and found Mary running alongside him on the left. She must have prepared the scarf.

He considered thanking her, but...

*...No.*

She had not done this to be thanked. So...

“This is perfect. Exhaustion builds up faster if your neck is chilly.”

He immediately swapped out scarves and handed the wet one to Mary.

“Could you wash this one?”

Her shoulders trembled at his question, but she took the scarf and nodded.

“Judge!”

It felt like so long since they had spoken, so the short response made him very happy and he realized just how easy-to-please he could be. However...

“We made it!”



The warrior unit up ahead had arrived on the opposite bank.

They set up their defense barriers on either side to secure a path for the others. A path to Kanie Castle.

Tenzou ran toward that. He reached out his hand and grabbed Mary's hand and the wet scarf in it.

He heard an "ah" from her, but that was fine. Now was the time to hurry. And just as Mary held his hand back, he saw the two girls in the lead running up the Kanie Castle's hull.

That was Futayo and Mitotsudaira.

Masazumi was shaky on her feet after arriving on the Kanie Castle's deck.

*...Ohh, I haven't had my feet below me in a while.*

She had been on Futayo's shoulder this whole time, which had certainly made things easier, but it had shaken her an awful lot.

But she had noticed something odd while Futayo ran up the side of the ship and when they had regrouped with Mitotsudaira and the others on top.

"Why hasn't the Kanie Castle reacted at all? And..."

Masazumi looked down at her feet.

The wooden deck was illuminated by the ship's auxiliary lights.

There was a large dark splotch in the center of the wood flooring which was washed out after long exposure to the sun.

"This is...blood, isn't it?"

Mitotsudaira identified it as she lowered her silver chains to pull the others up. Futayo agreed.

"Perhaps someone went 'splat!' here after being hit by one of Naomasa-dono's shots."

"How can you say things like that after eating tomato in your udon for lunch? But anyway, we can ask the people here what happened."

Masazumi noted when Naito and Naruze flew up onto the edge of the deck. She made sure they were ready to evacuate at a moment's notice and then called out to the rear of the deck.

"Takigawa Ichimasu, what is the meaning of this? Are you surrendering the Kanie Castle to us?"

"I've seen and accomplished most everything I had hoped to. After spending a bit more time with you, that's exactly what I'll do."

Her usage of "spend time with you" led Futayo and the others to lower their hips.

They were prepared to move. Everyone knew which angles they were in charge of. That was just how much battlefield experience they had. So while they might not be safe, Masazumi felt confident they were not in danger either.

"One question, Takigawa Ichimasu. How exactly do you wish to 'spend time' with us?"

"Shaja. It doesn't have to be long. I just want a quick fight so I can check on something. Once I've seen what I want, I will withdraw from here."

Then Takigawa approached them. She crossed the many puddles of blood on the deck.

*...Is she not hurt?*

"What happened here?"

"Curious?"

"Judge. We know you were speaking with Hashiba's Ten Spears not long ago."

"You noticed that, did you? Fine, then. We were completing my portion of the Battle of Shizugatake. The request should come through before long."

Masazumi thought about what that meant.

*...The Battle of Shizugatake is effectively the debut battle of Hashiba's Seven Spears, isn't it?*

It could also be seen as an internal conflict for the Oda clan. It was fought between Hashiba's forces and Shibata's forces and Takigawa would take

Shibata's side. So...

"Did you fight the Ten Spears here?"

"The result is none of your concern. All I will say is that it was the result I hoped to see." Takigawa raised a hand and pointed at someone. "Mito Lord. I choose you as my opponent."

Mitotsudaira was pulling up her king and Horizon with the silver chains when her eyes widened at Takigawa's statement.

"Y-you choose me?"

It was too sudden. There was no connection between her and Takigawa.

But Takigawa was pointing straight at her.

**Vice President:** "Why would she choose you?"

**Silver Wolf:** "If you don't know, how am I supposed to know?"

**Hori-ko:** "Perhaps Takigawa-sama is a furry."

**Mar-Ga:** "Genre-wise, furies tend to be more interested in male-male couplings."

**Flat Vassal:** "Why does the most pointless trivia have the biggest impact?"

**10ZO:** "Well, if you want a simpler explanation, Mitotsudaira-dono is the most exhausted and injured of our officer-level fighters."

*That's true*, thought Mitotsudaira. She had even broken one of her silver chains.

*...I need to repair that during the next full moon.*

While making a mental note of that, Mitotsudaira finished pulling up her king and Horizon and took a breath. She then turned toward Takigawa and stepped forward.

"Lady Mitotsudaira, take this," said Mary to her right.

Mary tossed her one half of Excalibur. She gladly caught it and squeezed the grip in her right hand.

She looked back to see her king nod her way. He was entrusting this to her.

So she raised Excalibur in front of her.

“As my king’s knight, I, Nate Mitotsudaira, accept your challenge.”

“I appreciate it. That lets me test what I need to test.”

*Test?* wondered Mitotsudaira.

Takigawa immediately began to move. She leaned forward, and...

“...!”

She took her first step. In that instant, Mitotsudaira saw something in front of her.

Takigawa’s body split into five copies of itself.

*...Copies!?*

*A classic ninja move,* thought Mitotsudaira.

It was such a classic that the textbooks included standard countermeasures for body copying techniques.

If she saw no ether light around her opponent’s body or below their feet, then this was either martial arts or a ninja technique.

And in that case, the copies were generally the afterimages of high-speed motion. It might look like multiple copies, but the enemy was moving along a fixed loop and she was only seeing the afterimages. So even if the number of attacks appeared equal to the number of copies, they were each the midpoint of a single flow of motion, so stopping one would stop them all.

That led to the standard countermeasure:

*...Launch an attack along the loop!*

Mitotsudaira moved forward. Five Takigawas were rushing toward her, but she stabbed Excalibur between the one in front of her and the next one to the right. She placed the blade in an intermediary point of the loop.

“How about that!?”

Just as she asked that, the five Takigawas all turned around. And they did so while circling behind her.

*...Eh!?*

*Strange*, thought Mitotsudaira. If they had all turned around at once, it meant she had made a full loop of the copies, yet Mitotsudaira felt nothing hit her blade.

*“...!”*

And Takigawa made a sword strike as she turned around.

Tenzou heard quintuple clashing swords.

That was not a sound that a looping afterimage copy technique could create.

“Are those solid copies made using martial arts!?”

Tenzou cried out in surprise.

Takigawa was launching sword attacks on Mitotsudaira in quick succession. The five copies of her moved at once to attack from every direction.

Each of the blades had real weight behind it and sparks flew around Mitotsudaira when she blocked them.

This was not a copying technique that used illusions or great speed to create the appearance of multiple copies.

Takigawa was using pure martial arts to create solid copies.

*...But I had heard no one alive could use that technique.*

**Gold Mar:** “I’m not picking up an ether reading, so how does that work?”

**10ZO:** “Judge. You use physical movements to split apart your body’s moving parts. So when you step forward, you vibrate everything from your toes to your head to split them apart between each of the desired directions.”

Yes, the trick was vibration. That movement was far faster and reversible than simple high-speed movement.

“Try vibrating your arm as you swing your fist forward. Your fist separates into

multiple copies in the direction of vibration while still moving forward, right? A stronger version of that is known as a solid copy. The main flaw is that it slows you down since you have to add the vibration on top of your original movement.”

But Takigawa had sped it up and she could even use different actions between copies.

That was like vibrating your fist to create multiple copies and then changing the way you clenched your fist at each point along the vibration.

How much had she strengthened and trained her body to pull this off?

**Me:** “Tenzou, can you do that?”

**10ZO:** “When I am in top form, I can split into two or three copies while simply running...but only for about five seconds.”

That was not enough to be practical.

But Takigawa was a different matter. She had five copies, they were perfectly coordinated, and they targeted Mitotsudaira’s blind spots and weak points.

“...!”

And they sped up even further.

Takigawa split herself apart and ran.

The biggest advantage of having five copies was not the increased number of attacks; it was the widened field of vision. Since she could observe her opponent from multiple angles, it was child’s play to tell where their blind spots were.

The Mito Lord currently held Excalibur in her right hand and was focused on defense. That concentrated her defense to the right and it left her left side open, but...

*...Sticking to a one-handed grip was a wise decision.*

If she held the sword with both hands, she could keep the sword at the center of her body. That was ideal for blocking weighty attacks and allowed her to

protect the center of her body, but that was meaningless at the moment. She was being attacked from all angles, so a two-handed grip would weaken her ability to swing the sword to the left or right and it would prevent any bursts of speed. Plus, there would always be a blind spot below her arms.

So instead, the Mito Lord turned her right side forward and swung the sword with her right hand. She made light movements of her right wrist to deflect Takigawa's attacks with quick sweeping and stabbing motions.

She also used her left arm to deter Takigawa. When Takigawa circled to the back or front of her sideways body and attempted an attack, she would raise her hand or swing it behind her to give the illusion of a coming Excalibur attack in that direction.

She was good at this.

Her movements were solid and she also had the technique to handle multiple opponents like this. Plus...

*...Is she using my scent!?*

Mitotsudaira reacted to the attacks.

She used steady sword fighting technique, but she was assisted by her Loup-Garou nose.

Takigawa's copies were created from the vibration of her body, so there was a time lag between her actual movement and the propagation of her scent. But the range of the scent allowed Mitotsudaira to generally measure the enemy's distance, speed, and range of movement.

Knowing the range of movement was most useful. That let her avoid moving more than necessary when striking back.





*...From there, I just have to figure out her rhythm!*

There was always a rhythm to people's movements. When someone swung a sword, they had to pull it back before they could attack again. Even with multiple copies, they were not all constantly attacking.

So Mitotsudaira only had to assign a single sound to each of the attacks and pull-backs. And for each of the five Takigawas movements...

"Nn."

Two attacks arrived.

"Nn, nn."

One arrived and two returned.

"Nn, ah, ah."

Each of the five Takigawas had two sounds. So the rhythm was decimal in nature.

"Nn, nn, nn, ah, ah, nn, ah, nn, nn, ah, ah."

The Loup-Garou hummed. She read her opponent's attacks and defenses, she sang, and...

"Lu!"

She inserted her own attack into the mix.

*...She's a monster!*

The wolf counterattacked at a rate of once every five times.

Takigawa had of course expected interference with her copies, but she had expected something less steady and more forceful.

But this was different. The enemy had worked out her attack tempo, yet she was not conforming to it.

If anything, this enemy was moving to deflect Takigawa's attacks.

Takigawa realized how dangerous this was. The Mito Lord was most likely using ideal movements without even meaning to.

She was reading the gap between attack and defense and then using that for her own offensive ideal movements. She had come up with the idea in this battle and had begun to actually implement it.

*...She's dangerous!*

Takigawa realized what a threat this girl was to the next generation within Hashiba.

And she remembered something else: what Matsunaga Hisahide had said in his final moments.

*...What will happen when the greatest creator clashes with the greatest destroyer?*

That was the question. Takigawa was currently assisting the creation of the greatest creator. She was not the greatest destroyer and she could not become it, but she was helping create the next generation's greatest enemy.

And she heard something.

The wolf's "nn" transformed into a "lu".

And each time she heard it, she saw more sparks and her blade was deflected.

She realized her enemy was surpassing her. So...

"How about this!?"

Mitotsudaira was suddenly hit by an enemy's attack.

A Takigawa circled to her right and attacked with a blade.

That alone was the same as the previous attacks, so Mitotsudaira sent Excalibur toward it with a light snap of the wrist.

But as soon as the light slash hit, Takigawa twisted her arm. She shifted to an attack that struck with the forearm more than the elbow.

But Mitotsudaira had already swung her blade. As a result, Excalibur dug into Takigawa's arm and sliced 1cm deep into her forearm.

*...Eh?*

That was a real result. She had successfully injured Takigawa. However...

*...Oh, no!*

Mitotsudaira realized what Takigawa was trying to do. It was her sense of smell that told her.

A red liquid sprayed from Takigawa's arm and that filled the surrounding space thanks to the high-speed vibration copy technique.

Takigawa intentionally let a few more drops of blood fall to the deck as part of her bloody mist.

More than the blood, she was interested in letting her scent gather there as a decoy for the Mito Lord.

*...Now, how about that?*

How far could this enemy go?

And she wondered if these people were capable of not giving up.

To not give up was to be indomitable. And that required something.

The most important thing was the willpower to never wish to give up.

But that alone was not enough. Willpower was meaningless if you were defeated or lost.

So you also needed the skill to keep that from happening.

When she had visited the Musashi in the Shirasagi Castle before, she had been defeated by their preparation. The final combined attack from the Ariake and transport ships had required a certain level of organization.

They had put together a tactic that kept them from having to give up.

But giving up was not something you could always see coming and deal with it or crush it in advance.

The spontaneous desire to give up was the most dangerous kind.

That kind arrived when you least expected it – when everything fell apart despite all your preparation and organization.

These enemies had strength. They had the strength to surpass their opponents. But...

“Show me whether or not you have the skill to constantly tear down the desire to give up!”

Takigawa targeted her enemy’s back. She sent two attacks from the front while also making three stabbing attacks from behind.

The enemy spun around and tried to dodge, but it was too late. Takigawa could see her wide-open back. So...

“...!”

Takigawa threw her entire body forward to hunt down this wolf.

Just as Takigawa used every one of her actions to strike down her enemy, she saw the Mito Lord’s decision.

The wolf spun around to forcibly turn herself sideways in relation to the middle one of the three copies attacking her from behind. But that was not a problem. The two on the left and right could still stab her. However...

“What!?”

The Mito Lord threw her body toward the middle copy behind her.

She used a light burst of speed and she did not even turn around as she did so.

*...She’s jumping right toward my blade! Is she trying to get herself killed!?*

This did not seem like an acceptable “answer” to Takigawa.

The desire to give up had to be crushed with strength, but this answer was entirely reliant on luck. However...

“—————”

Takigawa saw a stream of blood scattering from her right arm as it thrust the blade forward.

And the two Takigawas attacking from the front saw the Mito Lord’s face.

Her eyes were closed.

She had concentrated on the scent of blood to track the movements of the five solid copies. And she had shut her eyes to sharpen her sense of smell enough to distinguish the movement of the mist from the blood scattering from Takigawa's own movement.

The propagation of the scent was of course slower than their movements, but attacks began with a preparatory stance.

Even if the scent propagated slowly, she only had to detect that stance to know the attack was coming. And...

*...She read my copies' stances to accurately charge right toward me!*

She was not relying on luck. She had used her own abilities to adlib.

While turned to the side, the Mito Lord slipped between the three stabbing blades of the three copies.

None of them hit her. You could call it a Flat Chest Evasion.

*...I can't believe she came up with this solution!*

Instead of giving up on any of Takigawa's attacks, this enemy had used the blood trap to arrive at the correct answer. Meanwhile...

"Dammit!"

Takigawa knew she had moved too close. It had been necessary to defeat this opponent.

But when that opponent rushed toward her, the distance between them seemed to vanish.

"———!!"

Takigawa let her five copies' slashes and jabs hit her while she seemed to embrace the Mito Lord.

It almost looked like she was holding the enemy close while protecting her.

Mitotsudaira felt the strength draining from Takigawa's body.

She took a step back and saw just one Takigawa standing in the clearing blood mist.

She had several stab and slash wounds, but...

“Takigawa Ichimasu. What all did you do in your previous fight?”

Takigawa looked over at her.

And she smiled.

Then she waved a hand back and forth as if to say “go”.

“Don’t worry about it and get going. I know now that my era has passed.”

“Are you sure, Takigawa?”

That question came from Masazumi. And Horizon followed suit.

“What will you do now, Takigawa, um...”

“Um?”

Horizon held out her right palm as everyone watched her.

“I know a number is next.”

“Yeah,” said the idiot while leaning his entire body in front of her. “It is a tricky name to read correctly.”

“Heh. Do you really think that is enough of a hint to clue me in?”

*Is that something to brag about?* the others wondered before hearing bitter laughter from Takigawa.

“I’m going to head home and get some rest. If I stayed involved any longer, I would hate how much of a nuisance I was being. Also...”

She looked to Mitotsudaira and then to the southern sky.

“I was of some small use. That’s good enough for a final job,” she said. “So get going. I will keep using this ship until I’m back in P.A. Oda. And if I don’t leave right away, Hashiba and the others will be worried. Plus, I want to avoid seeing Hashiba before I head home.”

Mitotsudaira felt like she could trust the bitter smile in the woman’s voice.

*...And I can also see just how much she cares for Hashiba.*

In a way, Hashiba's forces would be inheriting P.A. Oda.

Not that that was too surprising.

But Mitotsudaira's king spoke to Takigawa.

"You're clearing the way for us?"

"I am not clearing it. ...I simply tested you and approved of what I found."

Takigawa snapped her fingers and the Kanie Castle's main lights began switching on. The ship also rumbled.

"Farewell, Musashi. It is time I became no more than a part of history. See me off and you will be dragged there with me."

The ship was starting up.

Katou Yoshiaki saw it from the sky south of Odawara.

A single aerial warship was ascending from the northern water source.

It was the Kanie Castle. It was likely headed west, to P.A. Oda.

She slowed Weiss Fürstin and looked back at it. She raised a hand and reverse-crossed herself.

"Nema. May your soul rest in peace."

"Yoshiaki."

"Yes?"

Her tilted head saw Kasuya in the rear seat.

The girl sat sideways with her head lowered and her clothing contained countless cuts. Her arms, legs, chest, and back had been cut and sliced, creating dark stripes of dried blood.

But even if her body was weak, her voice was not.

"Did I do a good job?"

"Of course you did."

Yoshiaki slowly spun Weiss Fürstin around in midair so they could watch the ship disappearing into the distance.

“Look,” she said while Kasuya’s hair swayed in the wind. And the girl bowed her already lowered head toward the Kanie Castle as it traversed the night. She audibly sucked in some air and spoke.

“Testament. Thank you very much.”

“That’s all you have to say, Kasuya. I mean you defeated Takigawa Ichimasu, who the Testament lists as one of Oda’s top four.”

So...

“Have you met Ootani or Kani before? You need to be able to hold your chest out with pride before you do. ...I mean, you do have a bigger chest than me.”

“Is that supposed to be a joke?”

“Testament,” said Yoshiaki. “Angie always holds her chest out and laughs when I say that.”

Takigawa saw a line of ether light in the distant southern sky. She thought she saw it spin around for her to see, but perhaps she was imagining things.

Still, she waved toward it and sighed.

And then the color red sprayed from her entire body.

“Takigawa-sama!”

Her comrades had come up onto the deck by now, so they cried out in alarm. But even as she endured the blood squirting out in time with her pulse, she raised a hand telling them not to worry about it.

“Two battles in a row was a bit much.”

Not all of the blood staining the deck belonged to Kasuya.

Takigawa had been hit too. Also...

“Kh.”

Blood gushed from the three slashes on the left side of her neck.



No part of her body was untouched by the red. Several *insha kotobs* opened and worked to stop the bleeding, but how long would she last even with that?

She sighed again and then inhaled quite forcefully.

She had trained her body to the point of pulling off vibration-style solid copies, so she could stop the bleeding by tensing her muscles. But more than that...

*...It's not going to last.*

She peeled off a charm applied below her uniform. It was an anesthetic spell charm that allowed a ninja to take action without any pain.

Without that, she never would have made it through that second battle. But for that second one, she had at least shown her pride as an Oda retainer. The Mito Lord may have noticed after touching her body, but that may have been why she had gotten through to the girl.

She held great pride in serving such a powerful nation.

Kasuya had fought her without that and the Mito Lord had fought her using that, but which one had been stronger?

"Send a divine transmission to P.A. Oda. Tell them Takigawa Ichimasu is leaving the battle line. Request the conclusion of my inherited name since I have completed all the major history recreations. Once that goes through, I will graduate from P.A.O.M. through voluntary withdrawal."

"Takigawa-sama!"

"Ha ha. Don't come with me, okay? That would just be sad at your age."

She laughed, leaned her back against the edge of the deck, and looked up at the night sky.

"I will be taking an escape boat later. I'm heading home."

She thought back.

"I was born in Koga land. Did you know that area is known for its pottery? It's in the mountains, but there's lots of water there. The tea is good too. You should visit sometime."

“How can you say that after telling us not to go with you!?”

She answered their reply with laughter. And she lowered her gaze. She looked down at Odawara and the artificial lake visible over the edge of the deck and she saw a few lights where the Kanie Castle had been.

The Musashi group was entering the ruins.

The ship began to rise as she watched those lights move. The visible area of land vanished as her vantage point rose.

*No, wait, she thought. My vision is actually lowering a bit as the ship rises.*

She was slowly slipping off the deck.

“Takigawa-sama!”

“Don’t worry about it,” she said. “You’re coming to visit me, aren’t you?”

As the others ran over, she pressed her back against the edge of the deck and sat back up. She somehow even managed to cross her legs.

“But that won’t be for a while. We still don’t know what will happen with the Apocalypse, so we might all forget about each other.”

*Yes, she thought. If I became a part of history, then they’ll all come to visit.*

And she thought of herself as a turning point for Musashi as they made their next move.

“Go learn about history, okay?”

# Chapter 71: Onlookers at a Historical Site

# 第七十一章

## 『歴史場の傍観者達』

思ったよりもち  
まちよつたか  
ちよつたか  
配点(見たい?)



*It was more*

*Normal than expected*

*Which was a bit of a let down*

### **Point Allocation (Wanna See It?)**

The passageway was made of stone.

The space was 20 meters wide and tall.

The Musashi group walked through it.

Masazumi was being carried by Futayo once more after needing help down from the Kanie Castle.

Crossunite led the way with a wide-range illumination spell raised overhead.

Masazumi looked around with the light of the identical spells held by Horizon in the middle of the group and the Tachibana Wife at the rear.

“The entrance passageway is narrower than in the Sanada ruins.”

“That one must have been built to dragon standards,” explained Urquiaga. “The stones used here looked more lightweight too.”

Crossunite turned back and nodded.

“Well, based on the echoes, it seems there is a single large area in the back. So if anything, I imagine this was built as a fortress for an eastern expedition to settle the land around here.”

So was it more of a watchtower or supply point than a base?

“In that case, I can see why the ceiling art survived here. This place must have been abandoned early on once they no longer needed it.”

“It’s hard to say whether it’s lucky or unlucky a place like this still exists,” said Mitotsudaira. “Also...”

She looked down at her feet. Everyone was in a hurry because water was leaking from cracks in the stone walls and the intensity of that flowing water would rise and fall in waves.

“This place seems awfully unstable. Are we sure it’s safe?”

“Judge. Looking at the movement of the spirits, I can tell there are some fairly uncertain areas.”

While following behind Crossunite, Mary looked back and raised her hand. Her white glove pointed to where ether light was gathering, wavering, and vanishing.

“A lot of the crust seems to be ‘missing’ in this area. It does exist as a water supply, but the water veins are in motion rather than fixed. So...”

Mary looked up to gray lines running across both walls near the ceiling.

“It must have been flooded up to there.”

“Ho ho?” Horizon nodded while holding up a large ball of light in both hands. “Was this due to the artificial lake created for the attack on Houjou?”

“Judge. The water filling the lake applied pressure to the existing water veins and that caused the crust to float up. I believe water pushed into the gaps of the blocks, those blocks moved, and the gaps grew more uncertain.”

“That was an excellent explanation with none of the confusing digressions you get when asking a nerd.”

Everyone readily agreed with Naruze’s assessment. *Is that because Neshinbara isn’t here? No, I have a feeling they would have done the same even if he was. Yeah, that’s just how it is. I shouldn’t worry about it.*

But then Horizon suddenly spoke up.

“I was told the Musashi did not fire its Kanesada and I did not fire the Muneshige Cannon because it would have damaged the artificial lake and ruins.”

“Judge. What about it?”

“Why did Houjou allow us to fight here?”

“Well,” said Masazumi. It was obvious enough if you had focused on Houjou’s reaction to the previous meeting. “The ruins don’t seem to hold much value for them.”

"I see." Horizon nodded. "Then wouldn't they be perfectly okay with this place collapsing on our heads?"

Everyone exchanged a glance at that. And they all put on strange smiles.

"Surely not."

All of a sudden, a block above Crossunit fell down along with a powerful shower of water.

"Waaaahh!" he shouted. "Don't scare me like that!"

"Tch. 1st Special Duty Officer, are you okay!?"

"Dammit. 1st Special Duty Officer, why are you okay!?"

"Oh, hell! 1st Special Duty Officer, why!?"

"Your hidden hostility is gradually coming out!" protested the ninja.

But meanwhile...

"Ah."

Two more blocks fell along with the water, so they all began to run.

Since Masazumi was lying over Futayo's shoulder, it looked like the others were chasing after her.

*...Why can't we show this kind of teamwork when our lives aren't at risk?*

None of them ran away, but she felt that was just a sign of how well they all got along.

Suzu monitored the others' progress.

She was reliant on the sound coming from Asama's divine transmission. It was being amplified and analyzed by the Musashi, but it was still far too little data. However...

*...The passageway...is simple.*

She had a good grasp of the space, but the blocks falling from the ceiling were frightening.

*...Wouldn't they be...better off if...they didn't run?*

And the events within the structure were not the only cause for concern. The Musashi's sensors showed her the terrain around the ruins, but some of that was oddly uncertain.

The ruins and the area around the artificial lake were shaking from time to time. The bedrock at the bottom of the crust was likely bumping together from the moving water veins. She could hear the rumbling of the earth. And...

"Huh?"

When Suzu held out her hand and began rereading the sensory data, she noticed something odd about the surface of the artificial lake.

The water level was rising. But at the same time...

"They made it...!?"

The space around the others suddenly opened up.

The scale was much smaller than in the Sanada ruins, but there was a definite hall there.

*...A remnant of the Age of Dawn!*

Gin arrived in a familiarly-structured but smaller hall.

She noticed water beginning to pool up on the floor. It had risen to ankle height and produced splashing sounds as they moved.

"Up above!"

She raised both hands overhead.

The 1st Special Duty Officer, who had already arrived on the other end of the hall, and Musashi's Princess, who was in the center of the hall, did the same.

"Can you see it!?"

Their wide-range illumination spells revealed the hall's ceiling.

It gradually came into view starting from the bottom, so they initially saw the relief depicting the events of the Age of Dawn. And in the center...



“Hey, Tenzou,” said the Musashi Chancellor. “What if it just says ‘Today’s Fortune: Excellent’ up there?”

“Ha ha ha. Knowing Shinto, that is entirely possible.”

*...And what are you going to do if it really does say that!?*

*It won’t, it won’t*, Gin told herself, but it worried her that the Asama Shrine Representative was lowering her head as if to avoid seeing an unpleasant reality.

But then the light reached the top. The three lights illuminated the ceiling from three different shallow angles.

“I can see it!”

*...Eh?*

Everyone looked at the very center of the ceiling.

When Masazumi saw what was there, she felt only confusion.

The hall’s central relief showed people lined up in celebration. They were holding hands, smiling, and celebrating what was in the center. However...

“Huh?”

A certain symbol was found at the center of the ceiling.

“The Double Border Crest!?”

**Novice:** “Wait!”

A sudden voice echoed across the hall. It was Neshinbara’s voice coming from everyone’s sign frames.

But Masazumi kept her eyes on the symbol above her.

There was a circle with a single line running horizontally through the center. There was only one way to interpret that.

**Vice President:** “That’s the Double Border Crest, right? Why should we wait?”

**Novice:** “This is from the Age of Dawn, remember? So even if the Double Border Crest was there, there is one thing I would like to say.”

That being...

**Novice:** “During the Age of Dawn, the people went to visit the Environmental Gods. Those gods are said to exist in a phase space located 6000km below the earth’s surface.”

**Vice President:** “What about it?”

**Novice:** “Did you know 6000km is about the same as the radius of the earth?”

Everyone looked back up at the ceiling when they heard that.

**Novice:** “They went, they returned, and the Song of Passage was created. The total distance is the same as cutting straight through the earth.”

**Vice President:** “Hold on.”

It was Masazumi’s turn to stop him.

**Vice President:** “Are you saying this relief is celebrating the visit to the Environmental Gods and the end of the various problems that resolved?”

If so...

**Vice President:** “What is the Double Border Crest? And what is the Princess?”

Her questions went unanswered. But she did recall the Double Border Crest drawn in her home after her mother disappeared.

*...Was she taken away because of something related to the Age of Dawn?*

She could make no sense of it. It was all too sudden.

But she realized Novgorod had been the same. Double Border Crests had appeared behind their backs then. She thought that was a side effect of being present for the Prince of Orange’s Princess Disappearance, but...

“Give me a break...”

She felt like she had found an answer and then discovered that answer made no sense. However...

“Hey! Seijun!”

“What is it, idiot?”

“Judge.” The idiot pointed at her and struck a pose. “You’re all see-through thanks to that loser’s punishment.”

“Is leering at me really that fun, you idiot!?”

Gin watched the Vice President hide her body while yelling back.

The Asama Shrine Representative looked down at the boy’s shirt she wore and went “ah” with a troubled smile, but that was unavoidable. That *belonged to her*.

Gin checked the front of her clothing since she had been hit by the same loser’s punishment, but...

*...The Far Eastern summer uniform has a band around the chest.*

And the bottom was made of thicker material so it could be worn separately. Still...

“Master Muneshige, had you noticed part of my uniform was rendered see-through?”

“No, because I am always looking at your face when we speak.”

“Then please look at my body as well from now on.”

The other girls backed away with an “ohhh”, but she chose to ignore them. All of this was perfectly normal.

Then she looked overhead once more. And...

“...?”

She noticed something strange.

“How odd. The center of the domed ceiling was carved away at the previous two locations. But...”

This was very strange when compared to her memories of the other two.

“That Double Border Crest is far smaller than the marks left erasing the others.”

*Really?* wondered Naruze.

She and Margot had not seen the underground reliefs at Novgorod or Sanada, so she could not say one way or the other if this was too small to match the marks.

“Then was there a different relief at the other places?”

“No, that Sanada Celestial Dragon said Houjou Tokiyori told him the only surviving relief was here, so we had to come here to see it. That would suggest the one here is the same as the others.”

Naruze had to agree with Masazumi.

*...Then this one would be the same.*

But when she looked up, she saw the celebrating people along the outer circle and the Double Border Crest in the center.

“The composition would have worked better on a non-domed ceiling.”

Did she think it had too much white space because it looked cheap? Or did people back then just not have a good sense of aesthetics?

Still, something seemed odd about the dome to Naruze.

*...How strange.*

She felt like something should have been drawn in the large white space.

“Asama, can you gather data on this place and send it to Suzu? There might be a secret in the structure.”

“Oh, yes. I will do that.”

Asama opened a sign frame and began a scan. And Naruze...

“I’ll scan the surface textures.”

She opened Burning Surroundings as the best spell to give her a full 360-degree view.

“Hey, Chancellor, I’ll use you as the center point, so stand there.”

“Sure. That looks tricky. Are you trying to make a model of the place?”

“Recreating what it looked like when it was built would be tough with all the dust and moss, but something about the place bothers me and I want to find out what.”

The size of the erasure marks and the blank space on the ceiling bothered her.

*I’m glad I came*, she thought. She could fly with her wings or her *schale besen*, so she generally wanted to avoid jobs that required descending underground. That was why she had not accompanied the others the last two times, but...

*...There are some things you only notice when you see it for yourself.*

And something else occurred to her.

*...Oh, I’m being awfully cooperative with the others.*

Was it a good or bad thing that that depressed her a little? But next to her...

“Ga-chan, Ga-chan,” said Margot. “Want to see where I’m see-through?”

“Wait just a sec. I’ll get Burning Surroundings done real quick.”

It was important to focus on one thing at a time, so she opened the spell and photographed above the idiot’s head nice and quick.

If she brought that data back and reconstructed the hall, would she be able to figure out what her issue was? If there was a hidden mechanism...

“The cliché is for everything to start moving on some kind of cue,” said Tenzou.

“Like someone pulling a lever or a string hanging from the ceiling?”

“Opening a hidden passage would not help us much. There does seem to be a storage space and living space further back just like at the Sanada ruins, but it has all flooded.”

“So we can only get data on this hall, huh? If there is a hidden mechanism, I hope we can find it.”

With that said, Naruze sighed. And the idiot looked across them all.

“Okay, everyone. We got what data we can and we saw Seijun-kun all see-through, so today’s Aoi Toori Expedition was a complete success. Let’s call it a day.”

The idiot spread his hands and...

“Ooooookay!”

He clapped his hands. Just once. Since he was an entertainer, the sound echoed across the hall loud and clear.

Just then, they heard another sound. The Double Border Crest ceiling groaned overhead.

“Eh!?”

They looked up to see the ceiling had split in two.

“Was there another picture hidden behind that one!?”

Tenzou shouted that just before pressurized water burst from the crack.

It hit the idiot, sending him rolling through the accumulating water. But the water from above did not stop and the entire ceiling began to crumble. They all watched the stone and water falling.

“That wasn’t a hidden mechanism! The whole place is caving in!”

“Retreat!!”

Even as Tenzou shouted that, Naruze saw the ceiling collapsing and the water falling.

After rolling in the water a bit, the idiot hopped to his feet while everything crumbled around them.

“I just remembered! There’s a rule that says old ruins always have to collapse! How could I forget!?”

“Ho ho?” said Horizon. “I do agree that the proof of the ruins is in the collapsing, but I would say this one did not so much collapse as it was destroyed. Do you understand what I mean?”

“Umm, are you saying anyone other than us could have inspected it without it collapsing?” asked Mitotsudaira.

Everyone averted their gaze and Naruze sighed.

“You people are a disgrace,” she said.

“D-don’t act like you’re better than us just because this is your first visit!” protested Tenzou.

“Why shouldn’t I?” she asked while looking up at the collapse again.

Something about that domed ceiling seemed lacking. Its concave surface reflected the waves on the floor as the illumination spells shined on them. And when Naruze saw that fluctuating motion...

*...Eh?*

She felt like she had noticed something.

Something that was key to answering her questions about this place. However...

“Ga-chan!!”

Margot tugged on her hand to pull her a step back just before a piece of the stone dome fell where she was standing.

The collapse had begun in earnest.

Asama ran a kinetic scan to predict where the stones would fall. When she indicated those locations by projecting light onto the floor from sign frames, almost the entire area was filled with light.

The hall really was collapsing. So...

“We need to hurry out of here! C’mon, Toori-kun, don’t even think about clapping again!”

She had to hurry too. After all...

“Wah!”

A piece of the dome fell right next to her, creating a splash. The dust solidified on the surface of the stone shattered from the impact. Once the water washed it off, its surface was smooth enough to reflect her face.

According to Mary, this place had been submerged by a water vein.

*...That may be why it survived relatively intact compared to the other ruins.*

But they did not have time to inspect it. She scanned the surface of the stone and started running. They all kicked up the water on their way to the exit. However...

“Eh?”

The air suddenly started to move.

The water level was rapidly rising. And the additional water was not coming from the ceiling.

“Water is flowing in from the residential area further in!”

“I’m not really too interested in helping out Musashi.”

Kakei spoke in the night while listening to the sound of flowing water.

He was south of the artificial lake. That put him at the bottom of the 20m valley created by the stones piled up as a dam to create the lake, but...

“When the lake is full, it appears to create a little too much pressure. The lake’s water pressure pushed in the bedrock by the water vein, but the vein’s water pressure appears to have pushed it back.”

“Yeah,” agreed Kakei while Mochizuki held his right hand.

She only had her upper body down to the bottom of the chest and she looked to the side of his face.

“The weight of the Kanie Castle and the exchange of shellfire must have destroyed the balance of stress applied to the crust. At this rate, the dam will burst and the water will flood Odawara Castle and the city below.”

“I had kind of hoped that wouldn’t happen.” Kakei smiled bitterly. “But we were the ones that chose this battlefield, so we’ve gotta take responsibility. I mean, even if Houjou’s going away, the people aren’t.”

He pulled his hat low over his eyes.

“Yeah, Sanada’s people will have to make friends with the people in Matsudaira and former Houjou land, so we can’t cause those people too much



trouble now.”

“What are you suggesting?”

“Removing some of the water,” he replied. “I’ll destroy a part of the dam to release some of the stress. It’ll still start as a flash flood, but once the top layer of water is gone, the rest’ll come out the opening more gradually. ...Sabotage like this is a ninja’s specialty, right?”

“Testament. But Kakei-sama.”

The dam was as tall as the valley and uncontrollable water was already starting to erupt from it. If he destroyed a portion of it...

“I will accompany you.”

“Then will you give me some of your explosion spells?”

“Testament.”

Mochizuki held her hair toward Kakei in the darkness. He took it and pulled some out.

“I was wondering if you would ever go bald, but these are extensions, aren’t they?”

“I am technically classified as a woman. ...Will half be enough?”

“Yeah.”

She nodded back.

“Please launch me into the water on the other side of the dam. And there is some unstable stone at the top of the dam, so I believe you too will have a chance to escape.”

“Wait, then what was that about accompanying me?”

“I simply wished to demonstrate I was prepared to do so if necessary. I could handle this on my own if need be.”

“Is that so?” Kakei swung his right hand and spoke to Mochizuki. “Bye.”

Mochizuki was looking up into the night.

She watched the Kanie Castle travel west in the black emptiness of the sky.

“Huh?”

She was not in the water. She moved her head and found she was in the forest.

She was lying in a forest well removed from the dam. Which meant...

“Kakei-sama!?”

He had thrown her. Thrown her away from the dam.

“I’d accept dying with a doll, but I haven’t lived a cool enough life to die with a woman.”

Kakei smiled and pulled his hat even lower over his face.

When he took a breath, a color other than shadow fell down to his feet.

He was bleeding. He had picked up Mochizuki and come here after his battle with the Mito Lord, but he had not been properly healed. He had been in too much of a hurry.

*...Yeah, I really am a coward.*

“I just can’t pull off the uncaring attitude.”

Unno would have been collapsed at the bottom of that battle area, but he had come here without speaking a word with her. Because he knew she would say something if they saw each other. However...

“This is the place.”

He pictured the structure of the dam and took aim. The entire dam was only visible from this position directly in front of it. That of course left him with no escape route, but...

“I’ve spent my whole life giving myself escape routes.”

But this was how it was meant to be. This was how everyone else did it.

So why couldn’t he do the same just this once in the very end? Besides, he had already tested his strength against the Mito Lord. So...

“—————”

He shut his eyes and gripped Mochizuki's hair in both hands. But then...

...A tremor?

A solid and heavy noise arrived from the distant ground. The bedrock was moving deep below the ground. It was a dangerous noise, like the harbinger of a landslide. So...

“Oh, maybe I am cool after all. I might be a ninja, but here I am saving the Houjou city in secret.”

But...

“Maybe it doesn't count when I'm only cleaning up my own mess. Yeah, I guess it doesn't. In that case...”

He held a fuse in his mouth and prepared to act. He focused his ears and heard something like wind coming from above the valley. But this was no wind.

It was waves. It was the sound of rising water as the artificial lake's water level rapidly increased.

A ton of water was pushing in from the underground water vein and coming this way with the wind.

So he just had to time this right.

“Are you ready, god?”

Kakei fired Mochizuki's hairs one after another. He held the soft hairs like pins and threw them.

“The water level has stopped rising!!”

Everyone in the passageway exchanged a glance when Mary said that.

The water was up to waist height. The passageway sloped shallowly upwards, so it was likely knee height by the entrance. But...

“That's a relief, but what do we do about *that*?”

Mitotsudaira was referencing the entrance.

The passageway's entrance was covered by fallen rock. And behind them...

"It looks like a giant piece of rock fell on the hall as well," said Tenzou.

"How are we supposed to get out?" asked Toori.

"Um...oh, I am receiving a divine transmission from 'Musashi'-san," said Asama.

**Musashi:** "To make this as simple as possible, if I were to fire Kanesada to destroy the rock sealing the entrance, it would vaporize all of you. Over."

**Almost Everyone:** "You were right about it being simple!"

**Wise Sister:** "Heh heh heh. I know what we need to do! We put Adele in Raging Beast and have Mitotsudaira slam her against the rock with her silver chains! Mitotsudaira! Where are you!? In the hole!? Well, you're no help! Foolish brother, you fix this! Start by getting Mitotsudaira out of there! Use the Flat Chest Push!"

**Silver Wolf:** "You're not making any sense!"

**Flat Vassal:** "And is there any reason for me to be inside Raging Beast in that scenario!?"

**Obscene:** "Ha ha ha! We wouldn't want you feeling left out, Adele-kun!"

**Sticky King:** "Indeed. If you like, I could sticky up the outside of Raging Beast to cushion the impact."

"Wouldn't that defeat the entire purpose?" everyone asked, but then...

"Gin-dono, couldn't we do something with my Tonbo Spare and your big thing?"

"If you split the rock with Tonbo Spare, the shock could accelerate the collapse overhead. And if I fired Cuatro Cruz in this narrow passageway, the shell or a fragment thereof could ricochet back and hit us. Are you sure you want to risk it?"

"Judge, let's do it."

"Did you hear what I said!? Did you hear a single word of it!?"

It took her husband and Masazumi to calm her down, but then Mary raised a

hand again.

“Um, excuse me. The water level appears to be rising again. This time, it looks like the lake water is flowing in here.”

“Eh?”

**Marube-ya:** “Who wants us to buy them an insurance policy!? It’s not too late! C’mon! C’mon! Hurry up and ensure the Marube-ya profits off of this tragedy! If you don’t, we’ll just have to forge the documents!”

**Almost Everyone:** “Calm down!”

But then Horizon raised her hand. She pulled Lype Katathlipse from behind her back with sweat on her brow.

“I regret to inform you that I brought the Muneshige Cannon with me. However, this is a magic cannon that can never hit its target. I dread to think what disaster will befall us if it were to actually come in handy.”

Mitotsudaira placed her hands on Horizon’s shoulders with a smile. After a breath, she spun Horizon around to face the entrance.

“Just shoot it!”

**Musashi:** “Excuse me, but about 7 seconds ago, a cannon blast with a very familiar visual effect grazed the Musashino from below. Did you need something from me? Over.”

**Asama:** “N-no, we don’t need anything. That was just a slight mistake!”

**Hori-ko:** “I see. If you stretch the definition, this still counts as ‘missing’. Impressive!”

**Tachibana Wife:** “Master Muneshige! Master Muneshige! Just think of it as more material for your site!”

**Me:** “Hey, isn’t that Noriki’s transport ship flying by up there?”

*What are they doing?* wondered Noriki from the transport ship’s deck.

He had hurried back for the Siege of Odawara, but then he had been forced to wait because of all the shellfire. Masazumi had considerably scheduled a duel with Ujinao for him, but...

**Laborer:** “Why are you firing Lype Katathlipse at us the instant we get close?”

**Smoking Girl:** “Hey, Hiro. Pick up the group down there if you can. You’re closer.”

**347:** “Sure, sure. Wait just a second. Backing up would be a pain, so I’ll circle around.”

After a while, his vision slowly tilted and began to turn. While the transport ship looped through the Odawara sky, he saw the lights of the ships gathered at Edo and...

*...Odawara Castle.*

All but the inner citadel was flooded.

That would more than establish the flooding for the history recreation. Which left just one thing.

“My duel with Ujinao.”

*It’s finally happening,* thought the Reine des Garous while looking to the north.

She was with the Hexagone Française forces. She had brought a curry meal back with her, so she had that arranged on a table and was enjoying it with her husband.

“Musashi’s transport ship is descending toward Odawara Castle.”

“Yes, I had heard,” he said. “So it’s finally happening, is it?”

“I wonder if they miss each other as badly as we did.”

“They have been apart a lot longer. It was only since this morning for us.”

“Oh?” The Reine des Garous smiled at her husband. “But it felt like so much longer to me.”

She circled behind him, loosely embraced him, and took his hands in hers. She guided his spoon hand to the plate, guided his other hand to her body, and pressed against his back.

“This curry was apparently designed after me, so I have some questions. For example, which part of my flesh does this meat remind you of? If you aren’t sure, I can give you two options. Is it here...or here? If you still aren’t sure, you will just have to eat it to find out. Don’t worry. I will give you the answer in the end. Because I very much want to tell you.”

Their half a day apart felt like an eternity to the Reine des Garous.

And the transport ship landed at Odawara Castle.

# **Chapter 72: Puncher of Foundations**



# 第七十二章

## 『足場の打撃者』

面倒ごとに  
付き合うために  
一千の面倒を  
打撃する  
配点 (男の子)



*To accompany you*

*In your troubles*

*I will punch*

*One thousand troubles*

### **Point Allocations (Boy)**

Kotarou received word from the on-site investigator that the water level had stabilized.

According to the divine transmission, they would now be going to the artificial lake's dam to investigate.

*...Thank you very much.*

The water level would not have stabilized by chance. Someone must have been thinking about the future.

And a duel over the future was beginning before Kotarou's eyes.

It occurred below the transport ship floating in the sky. Musashi was to the east and Houjou to the west.

"Now, let us begin the final duel of the Siege of Odawara."

Ujinao faced a boy.

That boy had changed into a Far Eastern summer uniform and he struck his fists together.

"Musashi Temporary Representative."

He named himself.

"Matsudaira Tokuhime."

Ujinao named herself as if to accept that.

"Houjou Representative Houjou Ujinao."

And as she named herself, she sent a slash toward her opponent.

Not even Kotarou saw it coming.

Futayo saw the sword wind arrive after the fact. That was just how fast the attack had been.

*...Such incredible swordsmanship!*

“Hey, Futayo, I can’t see with you holding me.”

“Oh, my apologies, Masazumi. I was so used to balancing myself with you over my shoulder, I thought I might be more stable if I kept holding you until we returned to the Musashi and went to bed.”

“Maa.”

*Oh, good. The anteater seems to understand.*

But then Futayo saw something else.

The color silver scattered about. It came from the left punch Noriki had thrown.

“Sword fragments.”

He had shattered the sword Ujinao had swung and pulled back.

But this was more than just breaking the sword. The damage propagated up from the tip to the guard, instantly filling the entire blade with cracks. And then...

“Break.”

With Noriki’s word, the sword in Ujinao’s hand was utterly destroyed.

Ujinao saw him swiftly pull his fist back.

*...What was that?*

She did not understand what he had just done.

She had sent a slash his way and he had responded with a punch. So why had her attack been the one to break?

She could tell he had used a spell. Her high-speed senses had detected a custom spell appear on his arm.

That was the trick. Most likely, that was not his usual January.

It was either a new spell or a modified version of the old one.

*...In that case, I can't afford to carelessly test it.*

That thought brought a bitter smile to Ujinao's lips. She had realized just how much the Warring States era had affected her.

She held no grudge against him. This battle was meant to bring the Siege of Odawara to an end and part of her did want to go to him if she could.

But they were both from Houjou and they were bringing Houjou to an end right here and now.

"I have one question." She spoke because she had accepted he had the power necessary to duel her. "Why did you come back now, Tokuhime-sama?"

"Good question." He nodded once. "I used to think it would be best to ignore it all, just go with the flow, and forget any of it ever happened. I thought we had two different lives and our paths had already diverged."

But...

"I realized I don't have to think that way if I'm willing to accept everything that entails," he said. "England, Date, the relationships that support me, and the entire world. If those people could carry all that weight, then surely I could take responsibility for just one person whose inherited name had ended. So..."

"So?"

"Let's end your inherited name here, Ujinao."

Ujinao sent another blade his way. But...

"I will break that and create what comes next."

He swung his right arm. Her blade shattered and the sound was all the proof one needed of its destruction. Then he explained the spell on his arm.

"Custom Spell: November. It's limited to Suwa, but when I make a counterattack, the damage from both attacks is converted into impacts and my attack is carried through to the target. Which means..."

Which means...

“This is custom made for use against you, Ujinao.”

**Flat Vassal:** “Eh? What does that mean?”

**Asama:** “Um, previously, Noriki-kun’s technique used three punches. The first two were used as offerings so the third one would reach the target without any kind of return force hitting him. In contrast, this new technique is limited to counterattacks, but that limitation functions as the offering to ensure it reaches the target. And it’s limited to Suwa targets, which functions as another offering to also convert the damage into an impact.”

**Hori-ko:** “So if he makes a counterattack on a Suwa opponent’s attack, their attack will hit him with impact damage, but his attack is also guaranteed to reach them? That seems like a lot of extra work for nothing.”

**Tachibana Husband:** “It is not for nothing in the current situation. This allows him to receive the Houjou Chancellor’s slashes as mere impacts.”

**Silver Wolf:** “Noriki was always a natural at punching. If he can properly block those impacts with his fist, he must think he can redirect the damage away from him. So just like he said, this spell was designed as a countermeasure for Houjou Ujinao.”

“I see.” Adele spread her mouth horizontally. “But I didn’t know the Houjou Chancellor was Suwa.”

She was answered by Neshinbara who was waiting behind them. He started by pushing up his glasses.

“Judge. Houjou’s main shrine is the Rokusho Shrine. As Sagami’s general shrine, its main gods are Susanoo and Kushinada, but as a general shrine, it also enshrines the gods of 5 other shrines. One of those is the Kamakura Tenmangu Shrine which enshrines a Suwa god. Thanks to that, it must have been easier for Noriki-kun to develop his spell for use against Houjou Ujinao.”

“Judge. I understand everything now.”

“Ohh, so you admit my explanation was a good one!?”

“Judge. Secretary, you came up with that method, didn’t you? That would explain why the spell is so unnecessarily complicated.”

“It isn’t unnecessary! That process is a crucial part of the whole!”

“Enough,” said Naomasa via divine transmission.

**Smoking Girl:** “I get how it’s so powerful, but what about the returning force? If he hits just wrong, he could destroy his fist.”

**347:** “Oh, no worries there. When he tested it at Suwa...”

After a pause just long enough for a sigh, Hiro continued.

**347:** “He had boulders launched into the air and he punched them apart as they fell toward him. He said something crazy about simply needing to ‘provide the necessary amount of force and then pull back his fist’, but that just shows he has some incredible instincts when it comes to punching. I guess that was obvious from his previous spell too.”

A smile appeared on Ujinao’s lips.

“Custom made for use against me? Just to be clear, I am a troublesome woman.”

Houjou’s history had not ended yet. And if it would be coming to end here.

“I will show you just how troublesome I can be.”

With that, she opened her eyes. Her glowing eyes briefly wavered at the scene before them, but then they focused.

*...Let us take a peek at the future, shall we? And...*

“World’s Steepest Mountains.”

Futayo saw the multi-containers spatially ejected behind Ujinao.

Shards of light scattered as they opened and auto-drawing swords were stocked within.

*...I did not get a good look at IZUMO due to where I was positioned.*

Ujinao was a Chancellor and she had the equipment to match.

There were at least 50 of the variously-sized containers and there had to be at least 1000 blades stored within them.

Then Ujinao gave instructions to the blades stored behind her.

“Higane, Kurakake. Tower before me.”

Two groups of a hundred each could be heard being launched.

A total of 200 blades were pulled out hilt first and then spun around. They rushed toward Noriki.

This was no longer a stabbing or slashing attack. It was a violent pressure taking the form of blades. However...

“Ohh.”

The intercepting fists danced.

At first, Futayo thought she only heard a metallic sound, but then it all transformed into destruction.

“————”

*It almost sounds like shattering ice,* thought Futayo.

Was this what it was like when a group of blades was broken?

There were sounds of impact and of metal crumbling and there were explosions of light and of wind. It was all created and then appeared to shrink down in the span of a breath.

*...Is he going to do this?*

The speed of the punches was increasing.

Noriki was moving.

He could only see metal shards and ether light around him. The only divine protections affecting him were a cooling spell and bodily reinforcement.

*...But that's enough!*

He had always fought like this.

And this girl was trying to join his everyday life, so what good was he if he could not accept her in his usual state?

So he simply kept punching. He stepped forward and threw his right and left fists.

“Oh!”

He punched and pulled back. He could not follow through with his punches. If he did, the returning force would cause more damage to his fists than necessary. Any damage that the cooling could not heal would lead him to failure.

So he avoided the follow through and immediately moved on to the next punch.

But the blades flying his way seemed endless. If he had to throw a punch for each and every one, he could never keep up. He had to hit multiple blades with each punch and intercept just the ones that were going to hit him.

He tried to maintain a standard of 5 swords per punch. With a left-right combo, he could shatter 10 swords per attack.

So that was what he did.

“Ah.”

Even breathing felt like it took too much time.

...*Honestly.*

If it was the Vice Chancellor, one of the Special Duty Officers, or someone else with that level of combat instincts and skill, Noriki was certain they could break through this with some other, more obvious power.

But he could not do that.

Due to his family issues, he had spent most of his elementary and middle school years on things other than combat training. That had been important for him and the rest of his family, but he could not deny it had left him trailing behind the others.



So he had devoted himself. Devoted himself to a single attack.

So that his attacks would actually mean something and so that he could survive.

But even with that, working as one of their primary fighters had not been easy. Especially with how much the others had grown from their recent combat experience. The gap between them and him only continued to grow.

So he was fine only clinching a few important points. If he could be of some use, he could somewhat make up for the trouble and worry he had caused them by the many years he lagged behind.

*...Honestly!*

Noriki heard Ujinao's voice as she raised her arms.

"Yagura, Myoujin. Support me from behind."

She swung her arms behind her with a magnificent sweep and two hundred more swords were added.

Noriki thought to himself while he started punching them.

*...This is my dream!*

*That was so long ago,* thought Noriki in his heart.

*In elementary school, they demanded we describe our dreams. Well, maybe demanded is taking it too far, but we had to write an essay on it.*

Yes, and what was it he had written back then?

"I want to be someone who can take care of everyone!"

He had been young and ignorant back then. By "everyone", he had meant his family, but he had not understood the distinction between "family" and "clan".

So who had he meant? His father who had thought committing suicide was his duty to Houjou and would "benefit everyone" because it would bring the issue to an end? Or had he meant his mother and siblings?

At the time, he had not really known.

But now he did. Now that he had a stable income from work and had a decent view of his future, he understood.

He could have a family of his own.

So that was his dream.

His father had once destroyed Noriki's family by removing himself from it. So...

"I'll remake it as my own!!"

His father had severed their ties to Houjou. And now...

"I will do it myself!"

But a certain girl was still bound by *that*. Her prosthetic eyes of foresight had been made by sealing her father's life inside. They were meant to protect her, but they also bound her.

*...I understand.*

After all, her body and prosthetic eyes had originally been designed in case the future queen of Houjou turned out to be sickly. In other words...

*...That easily could have been me!*

He gathered his resolve.

The version of himself he had left in Houjou stood before him.

So he would fulfill all of that and create nothing more than an innocent girl.

*Yes, that's right.*

He had intellectually known this, but until now he had never truly understood it in his heart. So he could say it here.

"That is the beginning of my dream!"

He raised his voice and threw his next punch.

"Tounomine, Hakugin. Hike the summits."

200 more swords flew in from sharp angles.

“Oh...no!”

Adele heard Suzu’s voice while she waited on the hilltop.

She knew Noriki had to still be fighting the Houjou Chancellor at Odawara Castle.

Suzu was monitoring that using the Musashi’s sensors. But...

“Oh, no? Did something happen?”

“Noriki-kun is...getting tired.”

*Yeah, I imagine he is,* thought Adele, but that was actually a big deal.

She could see Odawara Castle in the distance. The duel there reached her as scattering ether light, metal fragments, and loud noises.

A direct hit from any of that would not end well for Noriki. But...

“Ah.”

The flashes of light grew in number. Houjou Ujinao was sending in even more blades.

Ujinao watched his movements.

Her eyes could see a bit into the future and that showed her he was still unharmed. However...

“Byoubu, Kintoki. Seal the valley.”

That made a total of 800.

Given the gap of around a dozen years, that was nowhere near enough. It was not enough for even one stabbing blade a day.

She wanted more. Otherwise...

*...I cannot give him the answer he wants.*

He was telling her to test him.

He was telling her to throw everything at him so he could prove whether or not he was worthy of accepting everything of hers.

*...I'm sorry.*

*I hope you can forgive me for only testing you with around a 1000 swords.*

But to make up for that...

“—————”

Ujinao viewed the future. It was such a close future she felt like she could reach out and touch it. That power had protected and saved her so many times before.

The Advance Samsara provided by her vision was useful in ensuring her attacks hit and her enemy's did not.

But she also thought something else while sending out sword after sword as her duty to Houjou.

*...Please survive!*

The person before her would destroy Houjou.

If he did not survive this, history and process would cause Houjou to simply disappear.

But if he survived, Houjou could depart and go to another land.

It would not disappear.

It would depart.

So she hoped he survived.

But she had to test him.

*...Honestly.*

What was even happening here? She was using the prosthetic eyes that bound her to her father, but she likely had never intended to actually defeat this boy.

When she read the future, she was confirming that he was still safe and feeling relief.

The duality inside her was so very convenient. She did not hold back with any of the swords she sent out and she sent them toward any opening she saw. And

yet...

*...Please.*

“End Houjou.”

The Later Houjou clan had existed for about 200 years since the Kamakura shogunate and it ruled over 8 Kantou nations.

*...End Houjou here!*

But his stance was starting to slip downwards.

He was tiring. She was an automaton and she could continue to make her high-speed attacks with the help of World's Steepest Mountains, but he was different.

Still, she did not hold back. Half measures were not what he wanted.

If he wanted her to test him, then that was what she would do. So...

“Mikuni.”

And...

“Kami.”

The last group of 200 accelerated swords was launched toward him with a spell.

Ujinao saw the clash of light.

He was enveloped by that light.

*...So it was too much for him.*

He could not keep up and he was swallowed up by the swords.

*That must be what happened,* she thought, so she felt no hesitation and did not hold back.

“Stomp your feet.”

With those words, the light was slammed against him.

Futayo saw a certain phenomenon before her.

It was a rejection and explosion of light.

It was obvious what this meant.

Noriki had poured all his strength into his fist and shattered around a dozen blades at once.

But there was something odd about his movement. He had seemed so very exhausted before, but now he seemed to have come back to life.

“Ahhhhh!”

He gave a roar, gathered strength in his legs, and stomped his foot.

Immediately, the castle’s inner citadel was soaked with a cold sound.

It was water.

The artificial lake’s stabilized water had caused all of the rivers to rise. The city had a dry river bed to carry out the excess water, but Odawara Castle only had some hastily dug ditches.

Some shallow water flowed across the ground at the inner citadel. And...

“...!”

Splashing water joined the movement of combat.

Light burst and shattered and the splashing water reflected it all. The soaring light looked like fireflies rising into the sky. Ether light danced in the wind and illuminated the two locked in combat in the center.

But Futayo also saw the trick behind Noriki’s recovery and acceleration.

“The idiot’s ether supply!”

On her shoulder, Masazumi responded with a sigh. And she rested her head in her hand.

“Took you long enough, idiot. Don’t make a non-officer fight a war on his own.”

“Hey!”

Noriki heard Toori's voice.

"You're taking that girl back with you, right!? Then show her how we do things in Musashi! And tell her!"

He listened to the other boy's words.

"Tell her she won't be alone if she's with us."

The corners of Noriki's mouth bent upwards.

*...That's true.*

He had fallen behind, but the others had accepted him without saying a word.

Whether or not you were alone had nothing to do with whether or not anyone said anything to you.

It was whether or not you could be there with them. So...

"Come!"

Noriki destroyed the swords and, this time, stepped forward. He inhaled and threw a punch as if reaching out his hand.

"Ujinao!"

But Ujinao shook her head. She was saying "not yet".

And in response, that demonic girl danced beyond the continuing cascade of blades.

"Myoujou."

Ujinao used an instant launch to send out the anti-god of war sword atop her shoulder.

The 10m white scabbard was like a cannon. When the inner shell contacted the outside air, the outer shell was also launched. Both of them slid into position to fit together.

By that point, several torii-style emblems rotated along the scabbard as if slicing it into segments.

Then Ujinao gave the signal.

She launched that power to pierce the light and reach him as he attempted to move forward.

“Be as you were.”

She spoke quietly as she drew Myoujou.

First, the scabbard raced backwards with a solid sound and an explosion of ether light came from within.

Myoujou was launched with the force of a cannon. It flew down toward him in an arc.

“...!”

This was his final test.

Futayo’s eyes were glued to the sword before them.

*...Splendid!*

Anti-god of war swords were always worn down and chipped.

But not this one being swung down in front of her. It was a well-maintained weapon with no clouding or scratches.

“It would be an honor to be cut down by such a fine weapon!”

“Wait, wait! Don’t get me killed along with you!”

But Noriki’s spell was for intercepting an attack. There was only so much damage he could stop with it. A normal sword was one thing, but he would not have expected one like this.

However, his next action seemed to reject that idea.

He held both arms overhead and spoke.

“With three punches, I will defeat Houjou!”

He first threw his right.

“Custom Spell: March – Activate!”



Adele heard the triple blow as she stood on her tiptoes to watch from the hill.

She knew what Noriki had done. He had attempted to destroy the giant sword with the three-punch combo starting with March. But...

“There’s no way that’s powerful enough!”

**347:** “Oh, you don’t have to worry about that. He strengthened that spell when it’s used against Suwa people.”

So...

**347:** “I thought he couldn’t counter the first test boulder after it hit the ground, but he managed to destroy it using that. He really did prepare for everything.”

Then Adele heard the sound of splitting metal.

Light exploded on the battlefield as the sword shattered.

Everyone saw the destruction of the sword, the subsequent self-destruction of the container launchers, and...

“...!”

Ujinao’s arms could not handle the feedback, so they split and imploded from fingers to elbow.

But she still moved. She let out a heated breath and used her broken hand to draw a sword from her hip. And...

“It is over.” She smiled. “I will now assist in Houjou Ujimasa’s seppuku to take responsibility for the Siege of Odawara.”

With that, she sent the blade toward her face.

It sliced apart the eyes there and the light coming from them.

After the sword fell from her limp hand, she face Noriki once more.

“I have no need for eyes that misread the future. I believe my father is also apologizing for his failure.”

Noriki nodded toward Ujinao without even wiping the sweat from his brow.

He knew this was her idea of a conclusion.

“I see. I was kind of hoping I could speak with your father at least once.”

“Why?”

He pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and held it up while her closed eyes shed tears of blood.

Even with her eyes closed, he knew she could read it using her other senses.

He had prepared this before leaving the Suwa Shrine.

“It’s a marriage registration form. Let’s get married, Ujinao.”

Everyone gasped. Sign frames appeared so everyone on the hill and on the Musashi were present.

Inside one of those sign frames, Neshinbara lowered his hands to below his knees and then raised them.

“Three, two, one, go.”

And they all shouted at once.

“Lead with that!!”

*That’s not really how it works,* thought Noriki.

But the girls were discussing their complaints and criticism among themselves and the boys looked exasperated.

Nevertheless, there was one person smiling.

“Ujinao.”

“Yes?”

“Learn to cook. Also how to do laundry, how to clean, and especially how to get along with my relatives and the neighbors. Let’s talk about the events of the day with each other and, if anything is bothering you, don’t hesitate to discuss it with me. And...”

Noriki thought of his father and of the family he still had with him.

“Live a long life. If you do that, then I’ll always take care of you. That is my dream.”

She nodded with a smile. Real tears diluted the bloody ones and they both vanished into the water flowing at her feet.

Houjou would be washed away and cleansed with water.

And Ujinao nodded again while still smiling.

“I look forward to complaining after I outlive you, Noriki-sama.”

“Judge.” Noriki nodded and then looked back at the others. “Hey, why are you splashing around in the water so much? Was I that annoying?”

“Huh?” They all turned around and spoke in unison. “If you get that, don’t say anything!”

And at 9:50 PM, the end of the Siege of Odawara was officially declared.

Each nation began negotiating over their rights while they also rested and began preparing for the Kantou Liberation.

Since preparations were already underway, the Kantou Liberation was set to begin at 2 AM the next day.

That gave them approximately four hours to rest and travel.

# Final Chapter: Affirmer in a Place of Passage

# 最終章

## 『通過場の肯定者』



何もかもが  
単なる攻撃と防御の結果ではなく  
何もかもが  
ただ過去であるわけでもなく  
配点（成長）

*Everything here*

*Is more than the result of attack and defense Everything that was here*

*Is more than just the past*

### **Point Allocation (Growth)**

Kakei woke up.

It was still night. He heard the sound of heavily flowing water nearby and he felt several hard and round objects below his back.

*...A rocky riverside.*

He remembered destroying the artificial lake's dam and being engulfed by the rapids. He had apparently managed to survive that.

*...No, that's clearly not happening.*

He felt like the left side of his upper body was empty.

His organs and everything else had been damaged beyond repair. He was only still alive because his time had yet to come.

But he heard a sudden voice.

"Dad! This person woke up! He's still alive!"

*I'll be dead soon enough*, he thought in an oddly detached way, but then someone peered down at him.

His eyes had adjusted to the dark, so while it was blurry, he could see a middle school girl in a Far Eastern uniform and a man who was apparently her father. The man frowned but nodded toward Kakei. And...

"Let him rest. He must be exhausted."

"Thanks for that," said Kakei with a bitter smile.

*Oh, I can actually speak*, he thought.

"Where are you going?"

He had spoken to the father, but it was the girl who answered.

“We heard a sound in the mountains, so we went to check on the dam. Then all the water came rushing in, but...”

But...

“Did you do this?”

“How’s the city?”

“Dad says it should be fine if this is all that happens.”

*I see, thought Kakei. So I did a good deed in the very end.*

The father had to have a hunch who Kakei was. He was probably wondering why Sanada, an enemy of Houjou, would have done this. *But what’s wrong with helping people out? I just felt like it is all. So...*

“Miss, if you have the time, go visit Sanada to have some fun over summer break. I’m sure both Houjou and Sanada will be under Matsudaira’s rule by then.”

Kakei pulled a bundle of long needles from his wet pants pocket.

They were the needles he had planned to give to Nezu.

“There’s a shrine maiden named Unno in Sanada. Please give these to her.”

“Who are you?”

“Well,” said Kakei before breathing in and sitting up. The girl gasped, but he ignored it.

He was going to go as far as he could.

He worked to stand up. He stretched his body upwards as if beginning to roll.

And he got up onto his feet. Instead of wobbling there, he managed to balance himself just short of collapsing.

Then he managed to walk forward across the rocky riverside.

“Oh.”

Now he wobbled, so he reached out a hand to steady himself.

*...Oops.*

His left hand firmly grabbed something.

He was inside. It was an academy and he had grabbed the frame of the door leading from the hallway to a classroom.

He all of a sudden found himself inside his middle school academy.

Kakei realized his legs had regained their strength as he entered the classroom.

It was evening.

Every part of the classroom was dyed orange and black.

It was before summer with the exams just completed. He could hear the evening cicadas crying.

A single dark figure stood by the classroom window.

It was a tall boy who held a single long needle in his hand.

“Dammit.”

The boy cursed and threw the needle to the floor.

In that instant, Kakei sensed everything come to a stop.

The boy, the sunlight, and the cicada cries all froze.

Kakei realized only he could move.

“Eh? Huh? Um, hey.”

While confirming that his arms and legs could move, he approached the boy.

He saw the needle had stopped just before reaching the floor.

He picked it up, stared at it, and nodded. Then...

“—————”

He heard voices in the distance.

It was Isa, Miyoshi, and their Great Teacher scolding those two.

*...What? But this is our middle school.*



He started toward the hallway, but after a few steps, he turned back toward the boy.

In that frozen space, he spoke to the unmoving boy.

“Hey! Don’t you forget what’s about to happen today! Ikeda-sensei is a good person, so make sure to go to him for advice!”

Once he reached the door, he turned back again. And he said more to the still unmoving boy.

“You’d better notice it! I’ll be putting this needle out in the hallway, so you’d better notice it!” he said. “If you do, you can be real badass! In the future, you’ll be glad you believed in yourself! So...!”

He could not continue speaking. Instead, he wiped something from his eyes and dropped the needle in the hallway.

After seeing it stab into the floor, he took a deep breath. Then he looked back into the classroom one last time.

“Come here! There’s something out there that only you can do!”

He turned his back and walked away. He approached the voices calling to him from down the hallway.

At the same time, the bell began to ring.

Time was moving once more. Once he was certain of that, he spoke under his breath.

“God.”

He pulled his hat deep over his eyes and smiled.

“Thanks.”

“The sky ocean sure is taking its time.”

Fukushima heard Angie say that while they walked down a major road in the center of Paris.

The two of them and Kiyomasa were carrying the foods they had bought at

the festival stands.

Everyone here had spell charms pasted to them and spell circles floating around them.

“It should take about half an hour longer, so we should have time for a short break,” said Kiyomasa who was in a similar state. “Will you be on your way to Kantou as soon as that is over, Wakisaka-sama?”

“Testament. According to the message Kime-chan just sent me, the Siege of Odawara is over. She also said she’s met up with Kasuya.”

“I heard Takigawa-dono and Kasuya-dono fought,” said Fukushima.

She had also heard the result.

*...So the Takigawa part of the Battle of Shizugatake is complete.*

Kasuya was quite skilled. She had traveled around the Far East fighting in various battles, but would she be able to join the rest of them after fighting in Kantou? However...

“I do wish I could have met and spoke with Takigawa-dono just once more.”

“Fukushiman, you did go to Kantou, didn’t you?”

With that, Angie held out a grilled chicken skewer.

“Are thou sure?”

“I didn’t really know Takigawa.”

“Testament,” said Fukushima before a thought occurred to her.

She could tell the others about Takigawa. And...

“———!”

Down the road, a fight was breaking out between some Hexagone Française warriors and Hashiba warriors.

The commotion was already growing as a ring of onlookers began to gather around.

“This certainly is awkward,” said Kiyomasa

“We were fighting a battle not long ago,” said Angie. “I had to wander around

a bit before I found a stand that would sell me this stuff.”

That was not too surprising. And even if they were loath to admit it, it was helpful that the automatons under the Roi-Soleil’s command were working to restore order when these things happened.

*...I imagine scuffles like that are a way to let off steam.*

Fukushima approached the fight. She slipped between the people but entered through the back of the group.

“What is the meaning of this alarming commotion?”

They all turned toward her to complain, but they shrank back once they realized who she was.

She looked toward the Hashiba group and one of them scratched his head and nodded.

“They were the ones that started it, saying it was for what we did to their friends.”

“Is that true?”

The Hexagone Française group nodded, but when they saw the nearby automatons ignoring them and cleaning the road...

“But how do you expect us to act?”

“We were enemies just a bit ago.”

“You can’t just tell us to get along and expect it to happen!”

*In that case,* thought Fukushima.

She sat down.

“I will not ask everyone to get along.”

But...

“I can tell thee how bravely the eastern Hexagone Française warriors fought and how skillfully Miyoshi-dono and Katou Danzou-sama fought. Would anyone be interested in hearing that?”

“Will anyone listen to my stories? And does anyone have their own stories to tell?”

When Fukushima asked that, everyone exchanged a glance.

They did not seem to be ignoring her, so she continued.

“I would like thee to listen. And I would like to listen to thee. Because we can ensure everyone lives on in some way by telling their stories.”

*That is very true,* she thought.

She could never again fight Katou Danzou. The same was true for Miyoshi Nyuudou.

She had greatly tested herself against them and gained so very much from them.

She belatedly wished she could have told them how thankful she was and how strong they were.

And she felt the same way about Takigawa who had chosen to retire from the Warring States period.

She wished she had spoken with Takigawa about so much more before she left Edo.

Those who departed never said much to those who were left behind. That had to be because the departed already felt fulfilled. But those left behind...

“We can only tell their stories and hold the memories in our hearts. So...”

“Tell me.”

Someone stepped forward from the crowd. The Hexagone Française group spoke his name when they saw who it was.

“Lord Bernard.”

“I would like to hear about Danzou. That was a Celestial Dragon’s final battle. I would be honored to hear the story.” He looked to everyone around him. “Are you not warriors? If you are, then take a seat and be regaled with tales of battle. Warriors should be honored to experience the vicarious awe of a good war story. And if you are not, then leave and get some sleep. ...What do you

have to say to that?”

Everyone gasped. And...

“—————”

They all sat down. Some were a little slower than the rest, but the others pulled them down onto their butts.

Fukushima bowed when she saw it.

“Testament. Thank you. Many of us probably faced each other out on the battlefield, so let us discuss what we did and accomplished. This is a brief respite provided by the Roi-Soleil. So instead of ruining that with more fighting, let us exchange stories of how we fought.”

Everyone exchanged another glance at that.

And finally...

“I was to the west. I only saw the actual fighting from a distance, but I can tell you what both sides did there.”

A musketeer automaton said that while raising a brand new hand. Fukushima then saw Hachisuka join the discussion with the western unit. The Hexagone Française was quite surprised when they saw her.

“Ehhh!? That god of war was piloted by this little kid!?”

The warriors from the other directions clicked their tongues in frustration.

Seeing all that, Kiyomasa nodded toward them all.

“I can discuss the northern battlefield. What about the south?”

“Oh, I can and I was also viewing the east and west throughout, so feel free to ask me if there’s anything you don’t know. I can probably tell you. Also...”

Katagiri used Hundred Crest Land Survey to create models of light for each group.

“Ohh,” someone said upon seeing them. “So we’re reviewing our mistakes, huh?”

“It’s like a retake of the strategy meeting.”

They all laughed. Enemy and ally realized both sides were smiling together.

“Well, whatever.”

They allowed themselves to laugh and smile together. And they all leaned forward.

“Hey.”

With comments of “yeah”, “listen”, or “you see”, they started talking.

There were questions, explanations, groans, and surprise.

“That Illusory Dragon would have loved this. No matter what he said, he loved people. So coming together to talk about his final battle is the best way to see him off.”

Bernard said that and then lowered his head toward Fukushima. And...

“Do not tell anyone I bowed to you.”

“Testament,” she agreed.

“Oh?” said Kiyomasa while looking her way.

**Kiyo-Massive:** “Fukushima-sama, you finally smiled.”

*Did I?* she wondered before looking up into the night sky.

An ocean was forming there and she did not know if they could arrive in Kantou in time even if they left as soon as that completed.



——厄介な生き方を選んだものだ。

But if she made the most of the present...

*...Takigawa-dono and the others would be delighted with what we are doing.*

“Now, let me tell you about my battle with Danzou-sama.”

Fukushima began the story. She recalled her memories of the earlier battle. And she wondered if it was too much to hope this applied to the person who had departed and not just the person she had fought.

**—I have chosen a troublesome life.**



# Afterword

That was Horizon on the Middle of Nowhere 6-C. Just like last time, there was a festival in Odawara and a carnival in Paris and I think that was only possible due to everything I had built up to so far. It is thanks to all of you that I could do this. Thank you very much.

Both of those involved flooding, but actual flooding strategies are long-term battles that fail if the breakwaters are not built properly, so it takes a lot of national strength and technology to pull them off. Unlike modern times, they did not have the technical research and machines for such things, so people with the appropriate knowledge and leadership were greatly prized even if they could not actually fight.

After all, they did not have many construction materials back then, so if you were surrounding dirt with boards to create a breakwater, you could not drive the boards in too deep and the water would soak into the dirt and get in below the breakwater.

And just like castles and cities were not built like they are nowadays, roads and bridges were not as nice either. I feel like they were always struggling in the gap between using their people to their fullest and completing the construction work as much as possible.

Now, during the historical Siege of Odawara, Ishida Mitsunari tried to flood Oshi Castle, but the construction was poor and it failed. It makes you feel sorry for Mitsunari, but since he really liked Hideyoshi, I wonder if he was copying that flooding technique hoping Hideyoshi would praise him. Look at it that way and his character suddenly comes to life.

Anyway, the chat.

“Did you know water makes an effective weapon?”

“Against female prisoners?”

“No. Well, yes, I suppose, but that’s not what I’m talking about. Y’know, like during the Warring States period.”

“Warring States period female prisoners?”

“That’s a pretty narrow genre. But if you insist on talking about using water against prisoners, they did have water-filled cells during the Warring States period.”

“There’s a lot of that sort of genre from that period, isn’t there?”

“Oh, whoops. We were supposed to talk about our school days in this segment.”

“Our school days with female prisoners?”

That didn’t happen. My work background music this time was World Ends Girlfriend by Soulkids. I wish I had that level of “I was here”.

Anyway, the question this time is “Who was it that crossed over?” The Kantou Liberation is next, so please wait a little longer.

July 2013. The morning of a typhoon.

-Kawakami Minoru

# Notes

1. ↑ Kojiki can also mean beggar.
2. ↑ The kanji for “everything” is 全 and for “money” is 金.
3. ↑ The word for “egg yolk” is “kimi”.
4. ↑ Koumon can mean “anus”.
5. ↑ Changing one kana turns kiritanpo into kirichinpo, which means “severed dick”.
6. ↑ Takigawa means “waterfall river”.